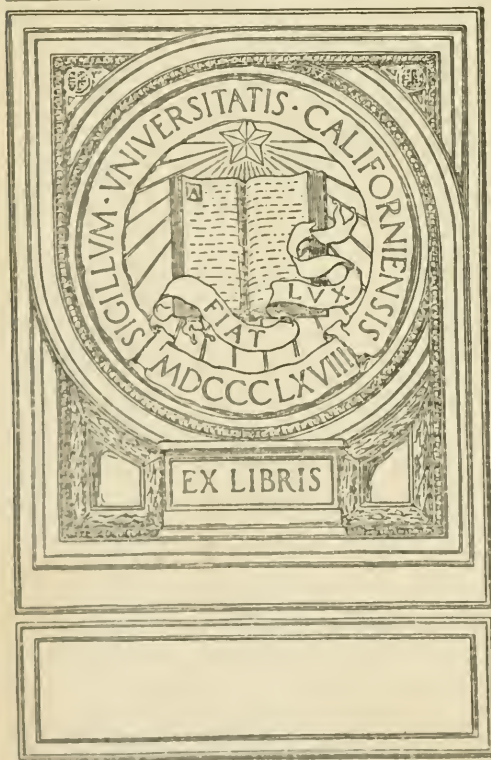


UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
AT LOS ANGELES





Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

MARTIN SECKER'S SERIES OF MODERN MONOGRAPHS

J. M. SYNGE	By P. P. Howe
HENRIK IBSEN	By R. Ellis Roberts
WALTER PATER	By Edward Thomas
THOMAS HARDY	By Lascelles Abercrombie
GEORGE GISSING	By Frank Swinnerton
WALT WHITMAN	By Basil de Sélincourt
WILLIAM MORRIS	By John Drinkwater
A. C. SWINBURNE	By Edward Thomas

Each volume Demy Octavo, Cloth Gilt, with a
Frontispiece in Photogravure. Price 7s. 6d. net

The Athenæum says : "We congratulate the publisher."

The Spectator says : "Mr. Secker's excellent series of
critical studies."

The Yorkshire Observer says : "Mr. Secker's admirable
series."

The Manchester Courier says : "This excellent series."

The Illustrated London News says : "Mr. Martin Secker's
series of critical studies does justice to the publisher's sense
of pleasant format. The volumes are a delight to eye and
hand, and make a welcome addition to the bookshelf."

MARTIN SECKER PUBLISHER
NUMBER FIVE JOHN STREET ADELPHI

AUTUMN BOOKS

The Complete Dramatic Works of
Gerhart Hauptmann. 6 vols. 5s. net each.

Vie de Bohème : A Patch of Romantic
Paris. By Orlo Williams. 15s. net.

The Art of Silhouette. By Desmond
Coke. 10s. net.

Walt Whitman : A Critical Study. By
Basil de Sélincourt. 7s. 6d. net.

Walter Pater : A Critical Study. By
Edward Thomas. 7s. 6d. net.

Speculative Dialogues. By Lascelles
Abercrombie. 5s. net.

Dramatic Portraits. By P. P. Howe.
5s. net.

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

MODERNISM AND ROMANCE

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

BY R. A. SCOTT-JAMES

LONDON: MARTIN SECKER
NUMBER FIVE JOHN STREET ADELPHI

First published 1913

ADDITIONAL TO VOLUME
PUBLISHED 1913

WILLIAM BRENDON AND SON, LTD., PRINTERS, PLYMOUTH.

343
CONTENTS

PART ONE: LITERATURE AND ART

THE DEGRADATION OF BEAUTY	PAGE 3
LITERATURE A FINE ART	14
PASSIONS SPIN THE PLOT	42
THE POPULAR TASTE	55

PART TWO: LITERATURE AND
MODERN LIFE

TO-DAY AND YESTERDAY	81
PROFESSIONAL POLITICS	96
SPECIALISM IN RELIGION	103
SPECIALISM IN WAR	109
SPECIALISM IN LITERATURE	115
PHILOSOPHY AND JUSTICE	121

PART THREE: LITERATURE
AND MEN

BERNARD SHAW	131
H. G. WELLS	151
ARNOLD BENNETT	170
GILBERT CHESTERTON	187
SOME MODERN POETS	196
J. M. SYNGE	222
THE SHRAMANA EKAI KAWAGUCHI	226
FRANCIS THOMPSON	235

PART ONE
LITERATURE AND ART

I

THE DEGRADATION OF BEAUTY

SOME time ago I found myself at an exhibition of Post-Impressionist pictures, under the ægis of an artist who was himself of that persuasion. Indeed, he was one of the exhibitors, and I was constrained to express my opinions in the form of questions. We passed before a picture which to my untutored eyes was formless, meaningless and ugly. It was by a well-known artist, and my instructor admired it. He said it was the head of a woman, and he indicated certain hook-like marks in the painting which to him distinctly suggested the nose, the mouth and the neck of a woman, reduced to their simplest terms. After he had fully explained the picture, I asked him if the result was in any sense beautiful to him.

“Beautiful!” he exclaimed, with something of disdain in his voice. “Why should it be beautiful? I do not require that a picture should be beautiful.”

He had not finished, but I was relieved by the first part of his reply. As I cannot hope to appreciate more than a certain number of things in the world, I am willing, so far as pictures are concerned, to be limited to beautiful pictures, and to be proved

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

ignorant and obtuse in regard to all others. For the same reason I have long since reconciled myself to the fact that there are some branches of science and natural history which I shall never master. I shall always endeavour to follow clever writers like Shaw and Brioux whose plays have, as the former puts it, "a really scientific natural history" for their basis. But I cannot hope to acquire the whole of knowledge or reform the whole of the world, and there are books which contain a great deal of sound knowledge and urgent opinion for which I have no use. Moreover, I deny Mr. Shaw's right to interfere with my enjoyment if I turn to literature which teaches nothing and serves no utilitarian or reforming purpose. It is only when I am in the scientific frame of mind that I desire accurate natural history, or when I am in the reforming frame of mind that I desire earnest exhortations to improve society. In the same way I am only drawn to the Post-Impressionists when I want, not beautiful pictures, but an agreeable sense of the impudence and imbecility of professional craftsmen. But when I am in the mood for literature and art, I demand something that shall appeal to my sense of beauty; and I refuse to be shamed into believing that I ought to prefer scientific knowledge, or ethical suasion, or those particular kinds of ugliness admired by some Realists and some Post-Impressionists.

But I was a little disconcerted when my Post-Impressionist artist concluded with the remark: "I have never yet found anyone who could tell me what he meant by beauty."

Certainly I had not asked him for an exact defini-

THE DEGRADATION OF BEAUTY

tion, or any definition of Beauty in the abstract. I should have been satisfied if, for the moment, he had taken it on trust, as most of us take the law of gravity, the postulates of Euclid, and the evidence of our senses. I was not dismayed because a single Post-Impressionist thought that "beautiful" is a word that has no meaning; but because the reply came so pat upon his lips;—he was repeating, parrot-like, a current view; he was adopting the fashionable attitude of scorn towards what is regarded as an ancient tyranny, long since indicted and exploded. This bland acceptance of the meaninglessness and the inefficacy of beauty is habitual to most young professionals who wield pen or pencil. They have learnt it from Mr. Shaw, forgetting that when Mr. Shaw demands complete freedom for the writer he also demands objective truth; or they have learnt it from Mr. Roger Fry, forgetting that even Mr. Fry demands some kind of subjective truth. Every young artist like my acquaintance at the Grafton Gallery, every young novelist like Mr. Gilbert Cannan,* is encouraged by the intellectuals to accept formlessness and anarchy as evidence of a magnanimous and enlightened spirit.

But it is not necessary to expose this falsity in its crude and most violent forms. For we may find it expressed in an almost academic way, with philosophical aloofness, a show of nice reasoning, and a kind of Epicurean sweetness in a Romanes lecture delivered by Mr. Arthur James Balfour and published under the title *Criticism and Beauty*. It is

* See Preface to *Round the Corner*. (Martin Secker.)

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

worth while to study so responsible a writer, for we may be sure that he will weigh his words, that he will not over-state his case, or be led away by passion or fanaticism. And it is assuredly interesting to examine the argument for anarchy as stated and defended by a Conservative statesman.

Indeed, it is hard to believe that the author of this essay is the same Mr. Balfour whom we know as the leader of the Conservative party. A statesman ostensibly so consistent in upholding order and authority in the Church, in adhering to time-honoured standards of government, and in trusting the judgment of men "trained in the tradition of politics," might have been expected to hold views somewhat similar in matters of art. We should have expected him to believe in the existence, not perhaps of artistic canons, but of artistic standards; to be convinced that in æsthetics there is an æsthetic right and wrong; to attach weight to the judgment of men of "trained sensibility." But it is not so. He holds in the most extreme form the ancient doctrine that *seeming* is *being*. Art, as such, has for him nothing to do with truth. He recognises no valid standard of excellence. The only excellence in a work of art is to afford æsthetic pleasure, and the pleasure which a boy derives from a blood-curdling adventure-book or the public from a popular melodrama is, in Mr. Balfour's view, no less "æsthetic" than the pleasure which another may derive from contemplating a statue by Michelangelo. There is no universal standard; no criterion; no excellence in art except such as each man accepts for himself.

THE DEGRADATION OF BEAUTY

Mr. Balfour does, indeed, make a proper distinction between art as "technical dexterity" and art as related to the "sublime," the "beautiful," the "pathetic," the "humorous," the "melodious," and admits that it is possible to apply an "objective test" to technical skill—to decide that this line scans, that this rhyme is flawless, that these bars in music are in such-and-such a key. But he will allow no objective grounds of excellence to art in the more important sense. If you say that this poem is beautiful or sublime, you are asserting what is only true for you, a mere personal preference which others need not be expected to share. Not only do men of "trained sensibility" differ from the uncultured, but they differ equally from one another. He cites the evidence of Greek music to show how widely the cultured of one nation and epoch may differ from the cultured of other nations and epochs. Having laid it down as an axiom that our æsthetic judgments are "for the most part immediate, and, so to speak, intuitive," and observing that the fastidious differ among themselves, and that their delight in fine objects is no more intense than the delight of the vulgar in coarser themes, he proceeds to the conclusion that there can be no valid right or wrong in taste, no absolute standard of beauty. He even maintains that art is not based upon any special faculty for perceiving the true. "I can find no justification in experience for associating great art with penetrating insight."

Before going further it is necessary to hint at a curious confusion in which he here involves himself—

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

a surely rather crude confusion between æsthetic, and moral, right and wrong. Being concerned to disprove the existence of the former, he for a moment identifies it with the latter. It is either, as I have taken it, a crude confusion of thought, or an equivocating device more often used in political controversy than in the domain of art criticism—that of identifying the opinion attacked with another of an ignominious character. The view which he is rejecting is thus set forth. “An artist is deemed to be more than the maker of beautiful things. He is a seer, a moralist, a prophet.” Surely he must realise that there are many who would most fervently hold that an artist must be a seer or even a prophet, who would ridicule the idea that he must be that very different sort of thing, a moralist. And in the same way, when he has declared categorically: “I can find no justification in experience for associating great art with penetrating insight,” he almost ludicrously adds, “or good art with good morals.”

It is this confusion of the aim of the artist with the aims of other expounders—the moralist, the philosopher, the theologian—that vitiates his argument against the insight of the great artists. Why does he deny them this “penetrating insight?” Because they have cherished opposite convictions about fundamental matters. “Optimism and pessimism; materialism and spiritualism; theism, pantheism, atheism, morality and immorality; religion and irreligion; lofty resignation and passionate revolt—each and all have inspired or helped to inspire the creators of artistic beauty.” The *non*

THE DEGRADATION OF BEAUTY

sequitur of this argument lies in the fact that he only shows that artists have differed in respect of what is not essential to art. If he had shown that some artists have created the beautiful, and others have created the ugly, he would have produced evidence fatal to his opponents. As it is he has denied perception of the beautiful to artists because they differ in respect of that which has no necessary connection with beauty.

But to leave this technical, though not wholly unreal, disputation. There is this merit in Mr. Balfour's essay : that it states in its most extreme form a view for which there is something to be said and which has been gaining in favour in modern times. It is a reaction against the view which became established in the course of the last century. It was the habit of the eighteenth century to judge poetry by its form alone ; the nineteenth judged it by the spirit which inspired it, by that which, as De Quincey puts it, was " incarnated " in a work of art. William Blake literally believed that there was a real world of the imagination which was opened up to the artist in his visions, and that was why he said : " Learn to see *through*, not *with*, the eye." Coleridge, too, asserted the primacy of Reason and imagination ; and for Wordsworth poetry was " Reason in her most exalted form," just as for Keats " Beauty is truth, truth Beauty." Even so logical and prosaic a thinker as John Stuart Mill recognised that supremacy of the artist to which he himself could not attain ; the artist, as he said in a letter to Carlyle, perceives truth immediately, by intuition, and it was his own humble

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

function to translate the truths discerned by the artist into logic. "Is not the distinction between mysticism, the mysticism which is of truth, and mere dreamery, or the institution of imaginations for realities, exactly this, that mysticism may be translated into logic?" Logic, for Mill, was only the hand-servant of that art which is concerned, not with "imaginations" only, but with realities. And it was in the same spirit that Matthew Arnold laid down his decisive verdict that literature is a criticism of life, that it may be subjected to a "universal" estimate, and that the standard is "the best that has been said and thought in the world."

But in recent years there has been a revolt against the idea of standards or authority in art. Art has always been conceived as something which affords pleasure; but now it is conceived as that which affords pleasure to anyone. The democracy, now that it has become literate, claims the right of private judgment, equality for its members even in matters of art. And in a sense it is right. Nothing should be or can be acclaimed as beautiful unless it appears beautiful to the spectator. There is no criterion of beauty outside the perception of beauty. For each man, that only is beautiful which affords him the experience of beauty; and whatever does afford him that experience has given him the æsthetic pleasure which is the true pleasure of art. But there are many pleasurable thrills which have nothing to do with beauty or with art. That is why Mr. Balfour surely is wrong when he suggests that the youthful delight in blood-curdling adventures is an "enjoyment of

THE DEGRADATION OF BEAUTY

what is Art, and nothing but Art." But I agree that we are confronted with an antinomy which seems hard enough to overcome—on the one hand art is only good because some people have judged or felt it to be good ; on the other hand all sincere critics are convinced that some works are absolutely good, that their excellence is beyond reasonable challenge, and that those who do not perceive this excellence are lacking in fineness of perception.

The anarchistic side of the paradox is put in its crudest form by Mr. Balfour. It has been put in perhaps its finest and truest form by Mr. Henry James :

Art is the one corner of human life in which we may take our ease. To justify our presence there the only thing demanded of us is that we shall have felt the representational impulse. In other connections our impulses are conditioned and embarrassed ; we are allowed to have only so many as are consistent with those of our neighbours ; with their convenience and well-being, with their convictions and prejudices, their rules and regulations. Art means an escape from all this. Wherever her shining standard floats the need for apology and compromise is over ; there it is enough simply that we please or are pleased. There the tree is judged only by its fruits. If these are sweet the tree is justified—and not less so the consumer. . . . Differences here are not iniquity and righteousness ; they are simply variations of temperament, kinds of curiosity. We are not under theological government.

It is true ; in art, at least, we are "not under theological government," and that was a maxim

worth asserting at a time when the *dicta* of Matthew Arnold and Ruskin were being converted into shibboleths. It is necessary for happiness no less than for honesty that we should realise that poetry, music, and pictures are personal things : that what they are worth to us is their sole measure of value. And here it must be mentioned that Mr. Balfour puts forth two hints which are inconclusive enough, but which do dimly suggest a truer way of escape than that to which his argument leads. He notes, first of all, that art is disinterested : that it is not a means, but an end in itself. And, secondly, we feel towards beautiful things as we feel towards persons ; if they are congenial we may like or love them, though we can assign no ground for our preference.

If the analogy were pursued it might lead to something like a solution of the difficulty. For all fine art is beautiful expression ; it is self-expression : it is the expression of something which the artist perceives. If it strikes an answering chord in us we are satisfied ; and that fact of response means a community of perception, of æsthetic knowledge, between the artist and the recipient, something perhaps which is dragged from the depths of our duller natures but which burst forth in expression from the artist with his quicker and more apt perception. But let it be noted that there could be no such response or sympathy conveyed from one to another by a symbol unless there were some real bond, some existent principle possessed in common. Art is communicative, but not surely a communication of nothing. It communicates something which is not the less real

THE DEGRADATION OF BEAUTY

because it is intangible and mysterious. If its inexplicable nature is—is it does—in experience which some persons describe as transcendent, then that quality in it, which we call the "sublime" or the "beautiful," has at least to this extent a definite reality, that its nature is unique experience. It is this question which I shall examine in the following chapter.

Some men have not been so made that they can respond to the beauty which is summoned by art, just as some men, born blind, are not touched by the light of the sun. But it is at no moment to say that tastes differ. Men may differ about their friends, but they do not differ about friendship. They may have different codes of honour, but a sense of honour is the same thing for a savage as it is for a bishop. And so not all things are called beautiful by the same men, but beauty is the same for all.

II

LITERATURE A FINE ART

THERE are many people of my acquaintance who think it almost indecent to talk of literature as a fine art. They have the same distaste for the word "art" as others have for the name of God. It has indeed been misused in certain æsthetic circles and discussed almost unctuously, so that it is often associated with long hair and cant, and seems nonsensical if not disreputable to plain and honest men. I remember an Oxford don, chiefly noted for his cricket and his knowledge of Homer, and in later life for his dyspepsia, abusing a distinguished Austrian critic who visited the University—"These foreigners are always talking about Art!" Foreigners and long-haired æsthetes were one and the same thing to my atrabilious instructor. The latter was an exact man. No wonder he detested a word which is used so vaguely and in so many contrary senses; which is sometimes applied to a poem or a novel as if its "art" were an ornamental thing *separate* from the poem or the novel; or as if it were a mere synonym for style or adherence to some technical formula.

Yet we cannot very well get on without the word, and we certainly cannot avoid its connotation. No man in his senses can deny that there is such a

thing as the "art of literature," though it may seem absurd to talk about it. No one, however healthy in his tastes, would refuse to distinguish the statement "This is a very good book"—which may mean only that it is instructive, or useful for certain purposes—from the statement "This, anyhow, is literature"—which means something quite specific, namely, that this is a work of art. The very word would become less offensive if we could be a little less vague about it, if we could make up our minds what it is that it does mean or that we wish it to mean. We all of us distinguish between good and bad in literature, even if we regard our own judgments as fallible. We are all disposed to mistrust the opinions of our contemporaries, though we have a childlike faith in the verdict of posterity. Well, what is it that will satisfy posterity, and that ought, *a fortiori*, to satisfy us? What is it, in the domain of the delightful, as opposed to the merely knowable, which has value for the future, and therefore should have more value for the present? And what is it—an even more important question—which may have this kind of value for us, whether posterity choose to value it or not? That is the main point. We want to find what that quality is, in literature or any of the fine arts, which makes it a matter of so great consideration to us. What do we expect and demand from it, if it is to be something of real moment? That is one side of the question. And putting the question from the other side—What sort of process is implied in the writing of literature, and what is the sanction of the writer? It seems

we are compelled to form some provisional theory of art before we can make the most modest pretensions to discuss literature. For such a theory is implied in every literary discussion, in every review of a book, and in every appreciative or antagonistic reading of a book. I myself have written hundreds of reviews of books, and I certainly do not think it more presumptuous to set down what it is that I require, or believe that I require, in creative literature, and what that requirement presupposes in the artist, than to have written those hundreds of reviews.

I begin, then, from the side of our actual requirements, and I lay it down as a self-evident proposition, that if we mean anything at all by creative literature, or literature regarded as a fine art, we must mean something which provides us with an addition to experience, an experience *sui generis*. We demand that it should be something which will occupy us and engage our faculties, something not to be approached carelessly and indolently, but with energy and alertness of the mind ; not because it is abstruse or difficult, but because we are demanding something which will give full play to the spirit, which will come profoundly in contact with us when we are in fullest possession of ourselves, which will not merely stir us, but stir us to activity.

That I would take as an axiom. If we are going to regard fiction, for example, as a fine art, the artistic novel will be a book which we approach not for mere distraction, but for activity, mental and spiritual, for the opportunity it affords of putting forth energy, of

LITERATURE A FINE ART

giving full play to the vitality, of going through a vital experience. Just as the keen golfer delights in the skilful use of eye and limb, and is exhilarated by the difficulties and the physical exertion of the game, so the keen reader of a book enjoys the strenuous mental exercise it affords him. To some extent the mind is more elastic than the body. Even when it is tired it can sometimes be whipped into energy by thought, or reading, or talk, whereas the body in its corresponding state cannot so readily respond with accuracy and effectiveness. But the mind too—Heaven knows—may be dulled to fine issues; and it is only when it is in well-balanced activity that it can do full justice to a work of art; and that is no work of art which the jaded intelligence can wholly grasp. Anyone who enjoys pictures, and does not care to look at them perfunctorily or in a “sight-seeing” spirit, knows well that he can only appreciate a picture when he allows eyes and imagination to concentrate upon it, so that he *perceives* as well as sees it, and derives a complex impression from it akin to that which the artist felt at the moment when he conceived it. And in the same way with every work of art worthy of the name, whether it be a picture, a statue, a poem, a play or a novel, it is part of its excellence to call forth *activity* in the mind which apprehends it.

But we must note that it not only calls forth activity, but *disinterested* activity—and by that I mean an activity of the kind which is especially called forth in the fine arts, and not that which science, or religion, or ethics might call forth without the aid

of the arts. To preserve the analogy of golf, it may happen—and generally does happen—that the playing of golf makes the limbs more elastic and promotes general health. But to take an interest in golf is not the same thing as to take an interest in the health-producing results of golf. The true golfer is he who plays golf for its own sake and without any ulterior end, without thought of consequences, although consequences of some kind are inevitable. In the same way the activity called forth in all art, both in the artist at the time of creation and in the man who is appreciating it, is disinterested; he is, in proportion as he is an artist or an appreciator of art, concerned at the moment in nothing but the subject-matter of the artist, and the treatment; in making or receiving a certain effect, without thought of the possible practical consequences which may follow through some inference drawn from the work or some psychological result attending upon it. This is not a re-statement of the much-abused theory of “Art for Art’s sake,” for that theory has always tended to minimise the importance of subject-matter, and to represent Beauty as something aloof from the rest of life, instead of being inseparable from the warp and woof of things social, moral, intellectual, religious, and physical. When I say that the activity of the artist is disinterested, I do not mean that he may not be concerned with any conceivable theme under the sun, but that his business is to provide us with an experience, and that any end he may have beyond making that experience vivid and complete is an alien end, destroying his singleness of purpose,

LITERATURE A FINE ART

wholly disruptive of his art and destructive to its energy.

And here we must abandon the analogy of a game of skill, for whereas golf-balls have no interest except as things to be knocked about, the objects with which poet, dramatist or novelist deals are ideas, persons, associated things, having character and interest of their own. The experience he is to provide is primarily a spiritual experience, an affair of the mind and the emotions. And being, as it must clearly be, an experience *sui generis*, it is obviously not derived from a mere reproduction of life; for life cannot be reproduced excepting in life itself, whereas art claims no more than to be an imitation, or an envisagement, of nature, and its life is its own. What we demand of it is that it should put into its picture something that is and is not in nature—something, in other words, that is only there for those who choose to see it, but which the artist makes clearer, awakening the perceptions to that aspect of truth which he has in view. In a book called *The Ascending Effort*, Mr. George Bourne urged that the art of life consists in the realisation of “choice ideas”; meaning by “choice ideas” those which are refined out of the commonplace and the meagre; the ideas which are apprehended most actively, with all the mind and all the perceptions; the ideas which admit of relation to all other ideas, which come into some sort of harmony with such schemes of life as we have made. If this is true of the art of life, *a fortiori* is it true of the fine arts from which the analogy is drawn. In other words, the artist’s aim is not to reproduce the

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

facts which make up the mass of our ordinary and undigested life, but to substitute for the dishevelled commonplace the "choiceness" of an ordered interpretation. Only in this way can art give us an experience *sui generis*; only by the refinement and re-energising of the treatment can it give us emotions vivid enough to compete in some measure with the vividness of nature.

Implicitly all great artists must have accepted this general view of their function, and many in one way or another have explicitly stated it. "As light to the eye, even such is beauty to the mind," said Coleridge, whose meaning was philosophically definite, but in no way at variance with Shakespeare's too hackneyed but ever memorable words:

Spirits are not finely touched,
But to fine issues.

The "fine": the "alight" or "luminous": the "choice"—here are three ways of qualifying the objects which artists seek to present. Matthew Arnold was captivated by the simile of light, and having repeated Amiel's passionate cry for "more light," used "sweetness and light" as a refrain in all his criticism. Walter Pater, to whom the beauty of the human form, and therefore of sculpture, was especially appealing, loved to use such terms as "shapely," "comely," "blythe," "gracious," "engaging," to express the fine flavour* of a work of art. The quality may be manifested primarily through the intellect, as with Meredith; through the senses,

* The word "flavour" in this connection was constantly used by the late Canon Ainger.

as with Swinburne; through the perceptions, as with Turgeniev, Flaubert and Joseph Conrad; or through intellect and perceptions acutely balanced, as with Mr. Henry James (who gives us "curiosity" as the keynote); but in any case it is that which we require an artist to bring with him—"fineness," "light," "choiceness," "comeliness," "graciousness"—when he visualises or focusses his object. Does not that untranslatable *λιπαρὸς αἰθήρ* of Homer—the shining upper air—suggest not only the physical atmosphere breathed by the gods of Olympus and the great-hearted Odysseus, but also the poetic atmosphere of the Odyssey itself?

We have, then, added a third term to our generalisation about art. We now require, as it seems, that it should provide us with an energetic experience; that it should be disinterested in the sense that it cannot aim at any competing, alien end; and thirdly, that this experience should come from objects made beautiful in the sense of being shown in a certain light, or made alight—in a manner which demands further inquiry. And here indeed is the difficulty. For we must endeavour to examine the question from the artist's standpoint, and seek counsel from him.

It would be no less futile than presumptuous to lay down exact formulæ as to what the artist ought and ought not to do. No modern critic is likely to waste his time in framing rules and canons, which can be so easily handled by the pedant and stand condemned by the first great man who defies them. Aristotle did it once and for all for the Greek drama, and when the perspective of life widened and new

forms of literature grew up to compete with drama, his rules were destined either to shackle literature or to be thrown ruthlessly overboard in the violent revulsion against Classicism. Shakespeare fortunately was guiltless of any exact knowledge of Aristotle, and the fact that Corneille and Racine, who had no French Shakespeare to precede them, were in bondage to that influential philosopher, had a lasting effect upon French literature which the mighty influence of Hugo was insufficient to destroy. But at least the example of these Classicist writers has proved that literature itself is not only profoundly affected, but made and unmade, by theories of literature. And Corneille and Racine bestowed at any rate this immeasurable benefit on their countrymen : they taught them the lesson of form and technique—a lesson which they have never forgotten, which is illustrated as much in fiction as in drama—in Merimée, Flaubert, Maupassant and Anatole France. Shakespeare, on the contrary, whose influence on English literature has been supreme since the beginning of the Romantic movement, provided no obvious model for the student of form. To the casual reader his very imagination seems to be lawlessness and extravagance, carrying him tempestuously and recklessly into the *mêlée* of poetry. But every careful reader knows that Shakespeare was not so reckless as he seems ; observe how rigidly he conformed to the conditions prescribed by the Elizabethan theatre and audience ; it is to the credit of his technique that he complied with these exacting conditions without cramping the finer issues of poetry and drama.

And in the broader sense of the term Shakespeare's form was precisely proportionate to his genius, though it is seen rather in the transcendence of his poetry and the management by which his persons are swept along on their own characters than in those more obvious elements of form—structure of plot, the subservience of dialogue and incident to the dramatic purpose, and all the minor probabilities and proprieties. But it is just the obvious elements which are most noticeable to those who study form in a superficial way ; for those who imitate Shakespeare, or are influenced by him, his careless freedom and extravagance often bulk larger than the expression of genius which made trifles of these defects. A result is that throughout the nineteenth century Shakespeare has been for English authors not always an inspiration, but a national pretext for decrying technique.

And yet those who had the insight and the power to restore Shakespeare in all his fulness to English readers were wholly free from this ignorance—conspicuously Charles Lamb and S. T. Coleridge. Coleridge was indeed the first of Englishmen to think out anything like a complete and satisfactory theory of poetry and the fine arts. The supreme value of his theory comes from the fact that he was one of the few who had actually experienced those creative impulses which as a theorist he endeavoured to account for. He had had the inspiration of poetry ; he had achieved it ; and to that extent he had indisputable evidence before him. If only on the one hand he had extended his method a little further than he did, and taken into consideration that formal side

of art which is dear to classicism, and on the other hand been more confident—or shall I say less shy?—when he considered the origin of the creative imagination, the ideal conceiver and creator of *Natura Naturata*, then his scheme would have been complete—probably too complete. On the latter subject, however, he threw out hints which were broad enough, and did not wholly shun the controversial sphere of metaphysics. The critic who would avoid the heights and depths of mysticism would do well to imitate his reserve, and exceed him in metaphysical diffidence.

“*Good Sense* is the *Body* of poetic genius,” said Coleridge, “*Fancy* its *Drapery*, *Motion* its *Life*, and *Imagination* the *Soul* that is everywhere, and in each; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole.” It is by that “synthetic and magical power” which he calls “imagination” that the poet “brings the whole soul of man into activity,” and “diffuses a tone and spirit of unity.” Coleridge’s theory of the Fine Arts presupposes his metaphysic; and it asserts the primacy of the reason. “Of all we see, hear, feel and touch the substance is and must be in ourselves: and therefore there is no alternative in reason between the dreary (and, thank Heaven! almost impossible) belief that everything around us is but a phantom, or that the life which is in us is in them likewise. . . . The artist must imitate that which is within the thing, that which is active through form and figure, and discourses to us by symbols.”

He defines the beautiful as “that in which the

many, still seen as many, becomes one," and takes as an instance: "The frost on the windowpane has by accident crystallised into a striking resemblance of a tree or a sea-weed. With what pleasure we trace the parts, and their relation to each other and to the whole." "The beautiful arises from the perceived harmony of an object, whether sight or sound, with the inborn and constitutive rules of the judgment and imagination, and it is always intuitive." It is that which "calls on the soul" (καλόν quasi καλοῦν). He conceives it to be the function of the human reason to discover the unifying idea which underlies all the variety of nature; and thus it is that when manifold objects of sense are reduced by the imagination to order and unity the soul is satisfied, and its experience is an experience of what is called the beautiful. It is with this discovering of order in the seemingly chaotic, in other words the discovering of beauty, that the creative artist is concerned. It is his business to inform matter with idea; and matter symbolically used becomes the expression of the artist's thought just as for the theologian the world of nature is an expression of the thought of God. "To make the external internal, the internal external, to make nature thought, and thought nature—this is the mystery of genius in the Fine Arts." And he goes on significantly: "Dare I add that the genius must act on the feeling, that body is but a striving to become mind—that it is mind in its essence?" And in all the *Biographia Literaria* there is perhaps no more striking suggestion than: "Remark the seem-

ing identity of body and mind in infants, and thence the loveliness of the former."

It should be observed that Coleridge's philosophy presupposes "a bond between nature in the higher sense and the soul of a man," presupposes, that is, that the spirit of the artist "has the same ground with nature," whose unspoken language he must learn "in its main radicals." It is only by reason of this bond that external nature, the manifestation of *Natura naturans*, lends itself to the artist so that he too may manifest himself. To attain this end the artist will imitate nature but not copy her. ("What idle rivalry!" he exclaims. Is not a copy of nature like a wax-work figure, which shocks because it lacks "the motion and the life which we expected?") The artist imitates what he perceives to be essential in nature; he takes the images which life affords him and so disposes of them as to bring to light the unities which the spirit loves; it is he who brings order out of disorder, imposing upon matter a form which the imagination has conceived.

For the purposes of the general critic of art, Coleridge has given us too much and too little. He gives us too much: for the acceptance of his theory in its completeness is only possible for those who can also accept his metaphysic (his artist stands in a special relationship to that *Natura naturans* which is a name for God). It is indeed clear to me that no complete conception of the operations of art can be formed without a complete metaphysical theory; but both are difficult to attain. Both lead to speculation, controversy, and a thousand opportunities

of error. And any systematically complete theory of art, seeking as it must to account for infinity, must, like all metaphysical systems, fall short of the truth by precisely the difference between infinite thought and the thought of one man—by the difference between the Universe and You or Me. Those who are anxious to learn what can be learnt about the creative process, and to explain it to themselves, not in terms of abstract thought, but in terms of the humanly intelligible and appreciable, may be satisfied with a lower degree of truth, with something more certain though not fully explained. We may be content if we can hit upon some least common denominator free from the controversies of metaphysics.

If that is our object, Coleridge has given us too much. But he has also given us too little. So generalised is his treatment that we are led to the conclusion that his perfect artist (who cannot exist) ought to express nothing less than the whole of himself in one single comprehensive work of art, as the divine Creator is conceived to have produced one harmonious expression of **Himself** in the Universe. What he does not sufficiently discuss is the imperfect artist—the only artist that has yet been given to the world. It is true the great genius in letters, or any other kind of art, can never rest content until he has bodied forth in a multitude of works all of that complex which is his conception of life. But he works under the conditions of time and space. His conception of life has been modified before he has had time to vanquish time. In practice, at any given moment, he is at work upon a single aspect of life,

upon one part only of his general conception, so that the most immediate task before him is not that of *unifying* nature, but of *separating*, of *selecting*; and only when he has thus separated and selected can he proceed to make a unity within that restricted sphere of nature—his particular subject. On this practical question, this problem, not of perfection but of imperfection, Coleridge is characteristically silent.

But at least we must follow him in his view that the great artist is engaged in the attempt to body forth, through the symbols which external nature provides him, his fundamental conceptions about life. Were this not so, art would not be concerned, as it claims to be, with what is most important in the world, or at least most important to the artist. "No man was ever yet a great poet," he insisted, "without being at the same time a profound philosopher." We may recall the dictum of Meredith: "If we do not speedily embrace philosophy in fiction, the Art is doomed to extinction." But there is a great difference between the two views. A work of art which is broad enough to embrace philosophy is not the same thing as a work of art which is embraced by philosophy, and is a complete product of the philosophical imagination. Meredith extolled the intellect, which works discursively; Coleridge extolled the reason, which apprehends intuitively. For Coleridge, the intellect was only the organ by which rational conceptions and intuitions are logically applied, and adapted to circumstance. From his point of view we might conclude that the genius of Meredith missed the greatest effects because, applying

LITERATURE A FINE ART

his intellect *discursively* to life, he so often refused to make it subservient to any central conception or intuition. However that may be, it is impossible to resist at least this conclusion, that the artist in whose work we feel a *background*, whose work suggests more than it directly is, being capable of arousing numberless feelings and associations in the mind, so that it stands veritably as a symbol of the whole of life, is the artist *par excellence*. Much of this effect may be produced by an *unconscious* activity which Coleridge recognised as a part of the activity of genius. Nevertheless, whether the activity is conscious or unconscious, it cannot do more than express what arises in, or passes through, the imagination of the artist ; it is his complex conception of life and the significance of life, his definite individual outlook, which accounts for this background to a work of art, for this suggestiveness which makes it appealing and awakening, for these associations which it has cunningly brought before us. And whether or not we are going to allow that something less than this can be called art, that the merely shapely (shapely as if by accident) ought to be included in its category, nevertheless, it is this which holds the highest place. The answer is given by all the great authors of the world who have left their individual stamp upon their art, who created images representative of life as they conceived it essentially to be.

But I am far from holding that those central conceptions which the artist embodies through the forms of his art are metaphysical conceptions. This is where I should disagree with Mr. Lascelles Aber-

crombie, who wrote some profoundly interesting chapters on this subject in a book on Thomas Hardy. Mr. Abercrombie laid it down that every great artist must have a metaphysic, and that in bringing his subject-matter under the form conceived by his imagination his metaphysic is throughout the work consistently represented (of course implicitly, not explicitly); and he suggested that we may apply a definite standard of criticism by asking: How far does a work of art correspond with the artist's philosophical view of life?—this being for him another way of saying: How far has the artist succeeded in imposing the desired form upon his material? With the latter mode of stating the question I should have no quarrel. But the former implies that the artist has devoted himself to metaphysical studies. Mr. Abercrombie may have meant only that every work of art presupposes a metaphysic; but so does everything in the world. The remark would scarcely have been worth making. So I suppose him to have meant that every great artist must have subdued his mind to a definite philosophical interpretation of the Universe, and that in his works he shows nature and human life as parts of the cosmic scheme definitely conceived by him. As it happened, the particular novelist whom he was considering, Mr. Thomas Hardy, exactly answers to this description. So does Sophocles, so does Milton—authors specially esteemed by Mr. Abercrombie. Homer, too, might perhaps be accounted for in this way; for he had at any rate a perfectly definite conception of the relation of men to the gods of Olympus and to the

ghosts who trod the mead of Asphodel; and to the perfect spontaneity, the unhesitating certainty with which Homer bodies forth the conviction of pantheism is due much of the charm and infinite delight of the Epics. Perhaps with ingenuity one might discover a metaphysic for Shakespeare—and even if we could not discover it, none the less it may have been there. But how about Herrick, Robert Burns, or even Mr. Henry James? Are we to equip them with a metaphysic, or exclude them from the portals of art? Shall we not gain more by requiring from an artist something, definite indeed, but less exacting and elusive than a definite scheme of the Universe; something which would admit, for example, Calverley; which would take some heed of the simplest of songs, and account for Lewis Carroll in the same way that we can account for Sophocles or Milton?

There is surely something more essential to a man even than his codification of himself in the final terms of philosophy. It is that kernel of personality which inclines him in this direction or that. It is this kernel of personality which turns him in the first place to philosophy, if he be a philosopher; or which makes him detest abstract speculation, if he is another kind of man. It is prior to philosophy. It is a condition of its being. It determines, surely, even the character of a man's metaphysic, setting him, not to range like an aimless ghost of thought across the Universe, but to express himself accurately; to express himself, with the help of his intellect, consistently. Now the artist, or imaginative person, is not seeking to express himself, like the philosopher, in terms of logical

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

notions ; and he is under no obligation to express himself, to himself, logically, before he proceeds to express himself imaginatively. All that is essential is that the kernel of his personality, that which determines philosophies as it determines every other achievement, should be directly, immediately, expressed in the figurative language of his art. This is the central, the all-important thing, that final, *essential*, and therefore indefinable entity which has thrust itself upon us when we say of a man that he has an "interesting personality." The more powerful and energetic a man is, the more distinctive become his ways of looking at things, his ways of thinking, observing, appreciating ; we discover a kind of centre of gravity in him, or a kernel which has been developed by active experience and reflection. This kernel of his character is to the rest of him, the accidental or inessential, what in the language of modern philosophy the "real will" of an individual is to the variety of his particular desires. The less he concentrates, the less is his real personality expressed ; the weaker the will, the more evident the inessential and slovenly parts of his nature ; the weaker the intelligence, the less adequate is his attempt to express himself.

The artist has not necessarily that "strong personality" which attempts to assert itself by influencing the action of others. His is the personality which wishes to express imaginatively. And by imagination I mean the making of images—I mean that stretching out of the *essential* personality towards nature, so that it may touch nature at as many

points as possible, fashioning it into images, binding itself to nature, and nature to itself, ever seeking to expand in this contact or sympathy, so that as far as possible the whole essential personality may be expressed through as much as possible of nature. The artistic impulse, the poietic or creative impulse, is that which impels him to the expression of what is most really and centrally himself. The world of nature as perceived by him when he is in full possession of himself assumes a form schemed by his imagination ; and it is this which he endeavours to body forth when he selects now these and now those objects to represent his conception of life.

We may, then, take it that the first essential to an artist is the imaginative impulse which makes him desire to express himself in terms of life. And the second is that energetic quality by which he endeavours to express what is central to his personality, that part of him which is his "real self." This is what is meant by "sincerity" in art. And a third surely is a sort of self-detachment, or sympathy, or knowledge, by means of which he is able to estimate the material in which he works. The two last mentioned qualities, taken together, imply a sense of form, in accordance with which the idea is embodied in the finished work of art, and technique—the professional knowledge by the help of which this embodiment is accomplished.

The objection may be raised that the man who has an essentially distorted or meagre personality and succeeds exactly in expressing himself is, according to my estimate, entitled to the same artistic

credit as a man of the loftiest ideas. To that I reply that though the clue to his work is to be found, in the last resort, in his personality, it is not by his personality that he is to be judged ; he is to be judged by his works ; and in producing these works he expresses himself, not in terms of himself, but in terms of external objects, in terms of life known to all of us ; and that if he perfectly expresses distorted or meagre views of life, the representation of life which he gives to us will itself be palpably distorted and meagre. We are all capable of detecting the falsity if the facts of life are distorted before our eyes, or represented in so dull or meagre a way that they afford us no vivid experience whatsoever. An artist stands self-condemned if his interpretation fails to correspond with that outward life to which our senses are a sufficient guide.

Indeed we have already demanded, as a self-evident axiom, that the artist should afford us a vivid experience, and that which directly contradicts the truth of common sense can produce no experience except that of confusion or disgust. It belongs to the first rudiments of art—the mere grammar—that an artist's convictions, as bodied forth in sense-given symbols, should not palpably and shockingly contradict the conditions of the sensible world ; his is the far more difficult and delicate task of expressing himself, not by violation, but by selection, emphasis, reconstruction. The penalty he must pay if he refuses these terms is that of being unintelligible.

But granted that the artist has obeyed this law, which is obvious to the majority of the sane, we

LITERATURE A FINE ART

further demand from him that his work should be "sincere," that is to say, that it should be consistent with his own clearest conceptions, his most urgent convictions, his most penetrating intuitions—in a word, consistent with that central thing which I have called the kernel of his personality. An artist is in this sense insincere whenever, for example, he inserts anything in his work which exists solely for the sake of convention—some of Shakespeare's clown scenes were often put in solely because an Elizabethan audience demanded them, and they were to that extent a truckling to convention, an insincerity. They do not express the real Shakespeare. Any artist not capable of entirely direct and spontaneous expression (and probably no great art was ever completely spontaneous) must make up his mind about himself, about what is temperamentally real in him, about that which is his primary *raison d'être*; and in accordance with, and out of this kernel of himself he must interpret all that he touches. By this means alone can he introduce order, form, unity into the indeterminate chaos of life. By this means alone can life assume coherent shape under his hands, and it is coherence and shape which alone can give us the impression of beauty, of that coherent shapeliness of matter drawn into the semblance of a living organism.

It may be a very simple unity, this microcosm of art, like a cell compounded from protoplasm, yet it will give us its corresponding pleasure, so long as it is made with the sincerity of the imagination. If it is merely the informing of life with the spirit of light

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

laughter—as in Calverley—it affords its proper pleasure—it is the spectacle of life drawn up into that kind of imagination to which laughter belongs. Lewis Carroll's *Alice* is in the same sense a work of art. Is there not throughout those two most charming of children's books an entirely consistent spirit of bonhomie and exquisite rationality—rationality of an order high enough to produce those delightful expositions of the irrational and the absurd? That the author of *Alice in Wonderland* was a mathematician is exactly what we might have expected—though he was, what mathematicians rarely are, the artist-mathematician, who understood the world intuitively as well as logically, and thus manifested his spirit of laughter and logic through an inverted world of contradiction.

And so again, if we take a modern author of a very different type, such a one as Henry James, whose concern it is to state life, with a view to throwing into relief the finer shades, we shall observe that most of his work is characterised by a kind of intensive culture, as opposed to that extensive method which through lack of form was abused in Dickens, and through obedience to form was satisfactorily applied by the poet Swinburne at his best. We may safely say that when Swinburne was at his best, when he was “himself,” his world was a world of rhythmical energy, of impetuous freedom and sensuous activity, which, translated into poetry, was expressed through the symbols of love and sea-foam and battle; to be true to the genius which was central to himself, he required no pregnancy or subtle suggestiveness of

phrase ; he needed no more than rhyme, rhythm and onomatopœic words, and with these he gave all he had to give—the sense of energy remembered, the sensuous delight of physical activity, a world of divinely glorified sensation. Mature readers do not seek him often, for there are only a few moods which he can satisfy. A writer such as Mr. Henry James stands at the exactly opposite pole. It was the proper business of such a man as Swinburne merely to affirm sensation, and he could do it perfectly. It is the proper business of Mr. James, not to assert sensation or any experience—he could not do it with sincerity—but to question sensation, to question emotion and sentiment ; it is his proper business to examine experience with the amused, searching gaze of one who expects the unexpected. It is his business to make experience interesting, not, like Swinburne, by multiplication, but rather by division—by the method of the microscope which reveals in a fly's wing some unsuspected fineness of pattern and variegated brilliance of colour. He himself is fond of the word “curiosity” ; it defines something that is central to his personality ; this, brought into activity by the “representational impulse” (which in his opinion is the one justification for the artist), takes form in the intricate and delicately woven patterns of human temperament which are the objects of his curiosity.

And now we begin to see why every critic, when considering an author's works, almost invariably, and instinctively, examines not only his finished works, but also whatever may be known about him as a

man. I admit, as all would admit, that his works must stand or fall solely on their own account ; but the critic finds that in seeking to discover the central interest and significance of an author's art his task is facilitated if once he can find the clue to his temperament. This backstairs knowledge does the trick for him. The bond between the man and his art is so necessary and immediate that no objectiveness of method can conceal it. It was by realising this fact, and applying his exceptionally fine critical intuition to this task, that Professor Raleigh, considering the *essentials*, was able to draw a very much more convincing picture of the personality of Shakespeare than that which was drawn, brilliantly indeed, by Mr. Frank Harris ; but Mr. Harris, I think, devoted his attention to qualities in Shakespeare which—whether in any sense real or not—were in any case secondary and inessential elements in the dramatist's character. And this is why his criticism, in spite of its brilliance, was comparatively unimportant.

I must not be supposed to mean that the artist begins with an abstract conception, and that he then proceeds to search for objects suitable to its concrete representation. There are, I know, brilliant novelists and painters who have proceeded in that manner ; but the result, to my mind, seldom reveals that complete unity of object and idea which men require ; for this method is so dependent upon the intellectual fitting of facts to idea that either the facts are forced and made unreal, or the idea is sacrificed. I am told that in the case of Mr. Joseph Conrad the process is

reversed ; he perceives, as by vision, some intense single situation—that picture, for instance, in *Lord Jim*, where the Captain looking over the side of his ship is tempted to desert his crew. Such a situation, a focal point in a story, is for the artist object and idea in one, simultaneously presented by the imagination ; the union of matter and spirit is already there at the moment of creation ; and in that way, I imagine, most of the finest pictures, poems, dramas and stories have been first conceived. When once that focal point has been presented in all its vividness and significance by the imagination, it remains for the artist to mass his detail in and around it as appropriately as his invention and technique permit.

We have now reached conclusions which were approached from two distinct points of view. Starting from certain axioms or self-evident propositions, and looking at art from the outside, I suggested that it must provide us with an energetic experience which we value for its own sake without thought of consequences or alien interests, an experience which has a fineness or an illumining quality of its own. And examining the same question from the inside—from the side of the mental processes implied in the act of creation—I have tried to adapt the conclusions of Coleridge to a view which should not pre-suppose his metaphysic, and have asked what is implied in this fineness or illumining quality in a work of art, this which is called beautiful. And when we learnt that all creative art comes from the imagination of the artist projecting itself upon the material of life, I

concluded that the two things essential to the creative imagination were knowledge and sincerity—knowledge of life itself, so that the artist can use an intelligible language and speak in terms of things real to everyone—and sincerity, meaning conformity with that which is essential or central in the artist himself. Art is thus a representation of actual life in terms of the artist. It must be real, and it must be ideal. It is the act of genius to be able to give us in one and the same creation a representation of nature and an expression of the artist's personality. This is the new thing which genius constantly adds to the sum-total of human experience—it is the old stuff of life quickened and illuminated by the new incarnation. And thus the stuff of life itself is increased, and succeeding artists start with a wider range of material.

We shall not find any actual artist completely satisfying the demand. For the difficulties of form are endless, and sounds, colours, words are obstinate materials when they are to be made the vehicle of ideas; and even the artist in the full tide of the creative impulse must always find that he has expressed something less than his intention and has strayed into the pathless wastes of the inessential. But it is the business of the critic to give him credit for all that is attempted in the sincere spirit of the imagination, and at the same time, in sympathy with the actualities of nature; for on the union of these two depends the truth which is the beauty of art.

But the artist himself is not necessarily concerned with these theories. His main business is intercourse with life, and also the envisaging of life rather “by

meditation ” as Coleridge says, “ than by observation.” He has to beware of the facts which overcame Coleridge himself, when he sacrificed the divinity of his art to that philosophy which banished the god. “ Well were it for me,” he exclaims, “ if I had continued to pluck the flowers and reap the harvest from the cultivated surface, instead of delving in the unwholesome quicksilver mines of metaphysic depths.” The “ shaping spirit of imagination ” which impelled him to unrivalled poetry in his youth was starved in him, not only because of his ill-health, his poverty, his drugs and laziness, but equally because he denied expression to “ fancy, and the love of nature and the sense of beauty in forms and sounds.” For him perhaps it was a poor compensation that through this denial he was able to leave us a unique interpretation of his æsthetic and creative experience.

III

PASSIONS SPIN THE PLOT

IF the reader has borne with my audacity in generalising about the main functions of imaginative literature, he will be willing to pursue a further and plainer question concerning its subject-matter. It is time to discuss a little more fully what I mean by that "energetic experience" which a work of art can give us. For the sake of simplicity I will confine myself to a single issue—to that kind of energetic experience invariably afforded by that small body of imaginative literature which the world has agreed to regard as supreme. If we can understand how literature in its greatest examples provides us with an "addition to life," we can, if we are in the mind to do so, extend the inquiry to the lighter and less intense experiences of secondary literature.

By "supreme" literature I mean the literature which has proved itself to be supreme—supreme by virtue of its conquest over time and over changes in thought and environment. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are in a language which we should have to learn if only for the sake of these two epics; they still profoundly interest us, they present emotions which can still move us; without Homer, the society which they describe would have vanished from human knowledge; through Homer, it is an inti-

mate and cherished part of our experience. This kind of supremacy belongs, I think, to Æschylus and Sophocles, and might perhaps be attributed to the Gospel of S. Mark, if that book may be considered as imaginative literature. Virgil and Dante—in part at least—are of this order, as also are Milton, in *Samson Agonistes* and the earlier books of *Paradise Lost*, and Goethe in the first part of *Faust*. And there are few besides Mr. Shaw who would deny such supremacy to the tragedies of Shakespeare.

Now these authors have survived, and are likely to survive, for a variety of reasons. But what is common to them all, and what makes us set especial store on them, is not merely that they have in large measure achieved what they set out to do (lesser artists have done that), but that they have set out to do a big thing, to give us the most intense kind of experience that we can have. In other words, they have produced the fineness which emerges through the intensity of human passion, and it is in proportion to their fine realisation of passion that we find them most moving.

I am not, of course, using the word “passion” in its modern vulgarised sense. For just as the word “romance” is often degraded to signify no more than a petty love affair, so the word “passion” has been appropriated to the amorous, sexual preoccupation which is the only intense feeling of many jaded moderns. Humanity, however devitalised, however incapable of varied passions, does not lose the love passion so long as it has the animal instinct of the fly and the rudimentary human instinct to idealise.

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

But a race must be strangely incurious if the only romance it can conceive is the romance of a youth and a maid, and its only passion the passion of sexual desire. Yet such is the state of mind—to judge by the common usage of words—of the major portion of modern society.

Needless to say, I am not wishing to disparage the literature of love, whether it be poetry, fiction, or of any other kind. English people least of all can afford to belittle it, for if we eliminated it half of our best lyrical poetry would go. For we count it a distinction in English poetry that upon this theme the changes have been rung so finely and to such exquisite effect. But much of the fineness of love poetry is to be distinguished from the fineness of the emotion of love. Lovelace declares to his Lucasta :

True, a new mistress now I chase,
The first foe in the field ;
And with a stronger faith embrace
A sword, a horse, a shield.

That is in the true spirit of English love poetry, which does not so idealise the amorous passion as to make it, in the modern emasculate manner, a substitute for valour, faith, honour ; it is not opposed to the manly virtues ; it may be the song which a warrior sings to the clank of “ a sword, a horse, a shield.”

But let us for a moment examine this matter of passion with which great creative literature is so evidently concerned. No acute physical pain or thrilling sensuous delight is ever dignified with the name of passion, in the significant sense of the word ;

PASSIONS SPIN THE PLOT

the essence of passion is mental, or spiritual ; emotion made intense by idealism turned in a definite direction, that is to say, by the idealising of an object which a man has set before himself. The meaning the word has acquired is almost the opposite of passivity ; it implies a state of the soul in unrest, a state requiring action. Passion is a suffering where the mind assails the body and torments it with an ideal imperative ; and it is the double tragedy of passion that the will may not be strong enough, as in the case of *Hamlet*, to translate that imperative into action ; and second, as we have it in *Faust*, that the object, when attained, proves to be not the thing that was desired. In a great passion the mind is set upon an object which it idealises beyond the possibility of complete satisfaction, and there is suffering because the will is thwarted and cheated of its ideal. Macbeth's passionate ambition to be a king, encouraged in him by the witches' chant, is an ambition for something that no being a king can satisfy ; and the tragedy of his passion lies in the painful effort by which he wins his object and the painful disillusion when it turns to dust.

The passions with which literature deals run side by side with actions that are impelled by ideals. The richest mind is that which can idealise every kind of activity, which can see what we call poetry in every commonplace, which can read destiny in apparently petty desires, which widens the vision of life by seeing in every action man in relation to the Universe. In art and in life passions are limited by the bounds of our perceptive imagination ; by the extent to

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

which we are capable of seeing and feeling things intensely. If we only see or feel ambition as a petty and sordid thing, in a petty and sordid person, we cannot make a tragic passion of ambition ; if jealousy is a little vice with no more than small results it cannot be the theme of imaginative literature ; if the religious ideal cannot be conceived as possessing the whole soul, we cannot appreciate the religious passion of a John Inglesant ; if revenge is no more than spite there can be no Hamlet, nor a Lear if arrogance is unmingled with love and honour. If, to-day, the passion of love is treated more often than any other emotion, that is probably because the one capacity for intense experience, which never seems to desert the human race, is the capacity to identify the sex impulse with an ideal. The great artist is not confined to this one channel of idealism. He sees branching out in every direction all the human activities intensified or refined by a spirituality which the lesser person sees only under the stress of love. But this fact is to be noticed, that whether it is love of a woman, whether it is ambition, whether it is love of humanity, whether it is religious zeal, revenge, or anything else whatsoever on a great scale, passion implies idealism, an object set before the mind in its spiritual or imaginative capacity, and that the intensity of the passion is enhanced by the difficulty of the quest.

Great passion, then, is a kind of critical union, or rather half-union, of body and soul. It is the perpetual effort of the body to become soul, the real to become ideal ; the painful and ever frustrated effort

PASSIONS SPIN THE PLOT

of the individual to become universal ; or conversely, the painful condition of the human soul which sees its ideal shattered and its glory reduced to dust and ashes. Its character is a problem for religion no less than for æsthetics. It is Browning who declares :

But priests

Should study passion ; how else cure mankind,
Who come for help in passionate extremes ?

The dramatist and the novelist need no more than the power to create such a passion ; for the greater includes the less ; it is not achieved in art, unless plot, narrative, style, and all the subsidiary devices have served to expose it in its reality and its intensity. This is presumably what Dumas *père* meant in the lines which Henley quotes from him : “ All *he* wanted was ‘ four trestles, four boards, two actors, and a passion.’ ” The passionate hero either strains towards an idealised object, or he still proclaims his yearning after the ideal by the lamentations with which he curses his ill-fate. Throughout Greek tragedy there is an undercurrent of protest against inexorable Fate which is set against the realisation of the ideal. The passion of Prometheus sums up the perpetual agony of the human race in its perpetual striving to rise beyond its limitations. The tragic irony of the Greeks is but the expression of the tragedy of passion in its pitiful reaction from hope, the intensity of feeling with which men see desire defeated and ideal unattainable. So, too, in the most intense moments the characters of Shakespeare become ironical :

Misery makes Sport to mock itself.

And we can readily understand, what some persons have thought strange, that Ophelia's language should become coarse, like Lear's, in the full tide of bitterness. It is the reaction after the perception of a spiritual beauty. The beauty seems broken; the earth and its foulness remain, and the anguished spirit sees the foulness exaggerated by contrast with its ideal. Lear, who had seen his daughters as paragons, sees them now as centaurs; he, who had adored their filial devotion, compares them now to the most obscene things which can besmirch the sight; nothing is too shameful to express the fall from that ideal.

We see, then, why it is that the highest forms of literature are necessarily concerned with pain. It is not merely that art requires intensity of feeling, and that the emotion of pain is the most intense we know. It is because the highest literature must necessarily be concerned with human beings in their most profound aspirations, in their most deeply experienced strivings each after his own ideal, according to his own conception of what will satisfy him; and it is because in the nature of things such an ideal is more than experience can satisfy that the anguish of striving and the anguish of failure are the subjects of art. A play such as Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* can never be regarded as great drama. Amid scenes of magnificence and splendid savage rhetoric *Tamburlaine* passes on from triumph to triumph, the incarnation of the conquering will. There are numberless detached passages of what we may call lyrical poetry—for a lyrical poem expresses no more than a moment's mood, a single phase of the sequence which

PASSIONS SPIN THE PLOT

is passion. But there is no passionate sequence in *Tamburlaine*; it is a monotonous record of much-vaunted triumphs. We do not feel the painful struggle; there is no prospect of defeat; there is no storm and stress of an ideal at stake, a human being battered by circumstance. We may, if we are brutal enough, bow down before Tamburlaine's Juggernaut car; but he does not touch our emotions; he is not a tragic hero. Tragedy has no interest in supermen; unless, indeed, like Chapman's Bussy d'Ambois, the hero has the courage of the superman with the limitations of the rest of humanity.

But if the superman is not a possible subject for great art, neither is the crawling earthworm. Many modern authors and critics seem to consider that because tragic passion is always painful, therefore pain is the essential thing in tragedy. It is this grossly false assumption that is responsible for many disasters in contemporary literature; it is the deep-lying error in much of our so-called "intellectual drama" and "intellectual fiction." I have heard authors and critics complain that the public will not read certain books or go to certain plays because they are "painful" or "grim." If it had been because these books or plays were "*passionate*" that the public had refused to attend, I should have understood the complaint. Pain without passion may be scientifically interesting, but it has no artistic content, no high emotional significance. Indeed, it is not true to suppose that the public dislikes the spectacle of the painful or the ugly. All know something of the fascination which disturbed Leontius, the son of

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

Aglaion, who, coming up from the Piræus, observed dead bodies on the ground ; and desiring to look at them and loathing the thought opened his eyes wide, exclaiming, " There, you wretches, take your fill of the horrid sight ! " If anyone doubts this let him recall that a painful and sordid episode in the law-courts fascinates the public just as it is fascinated by the crude villainies of East-end melodrama ; and that the most highly moralised section of the public can be stirred to attend to the persecution of Congo natives or Macedonian Christians only by the most appalling stories of massacre, outrage, and various forms of extreme suffering.

Surely it is not because they are concerned with painful subjects that many of the " intellectual " dramatists have failed—failed, I mean, not only with the very ignorant public, but also with more discriminating audiences. In some cases, which it is not my business here to specify, they have failed because the authors have set their hearts on a problem outside the subject of their art, and the art has suffered in consequence ; for only disinterested art has the power to move us. In some cases they have failed because the authors have held theories which I believe to be fatal to literature. The narrow view of what is called Realism has been an adjunct to intellectual faddism and propagandism, and has served to sterilise literature. The great Realists have never been mere Realists ; they have never thought that to produce art it is sufficient merely to reproduce fact. The word " Truth " has been introduced in the most shameless fashion. It is true that there are

PASSIONS SPIN THE PLOT

men without arms and legs and noses, but to delineate such a creature with exquisite accuracy is not to produce a faithful rendering of life. It is true that there are drab, sordid, expressionless lives, without happiness, without hope, without ideals. To describe these lives in all their miserable detail may be of infinite value for social and reforming purposes. It may be the duty of every one of us to study these sores in the body politic for the existence of which we are collectively responsible. It may be craven cowardice not to open our eyes wide to these painful and hideous facts, which cry out to be removed and prevented. And if any person whose enthusiasm in life it is to abolish them hits upon an artistic device for calling attention to them, he is justified by his object. But let us nevertheless be frank about the matter. His object is the removal of abuses. To stir emotions in a fine way is not his primary end and aim ; it is for him only a means to something else. We are not condemning him when we say that his object is not the object of the creative artist, who is concerned with life not in its partial aspects, but as a whole. But he on his part has no right to complain if he fails. The " truth " with which he is concerned is a scientific case, not an artistic truth. He has failed to stir our emotions because the attempt to stir emotions was only a dodge on his part ; he was playing a trick on us, for a laudable end, and if we are not taken in the fault is not ours.

Drama, fiction, poetry, and the other fine arts cannot tolerate even the best-intentioned insincerity. There is here no arbitrary dogma or canon of art,

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

but merely an assertion of the simple fact that you cannot achieve two wholly different ends at one and the same time, that success is dependent upon singleness of aim and enthusiasm. It is true that there is no subject whatsoever that may not lend itself to treatment. But it must be treated for its own sake, disinterestedly. Literature will not move us greatly unless it is concerned with great emotions. It will not move us finely except in the presence of an ideal. For in the great passions of literature, as in the great passions of life, there is always an ideal at stake, an ideal that is more than the attainable, a grasping at a fulness of satisfaction which is more than experience can afford.

I am making no appeal for what is misunderstood by the term "Art for Art's sake," or for that typically French view the expression of which I may take from the younger Dumas' *Affaire Clemenceau* :

Savez-vous ce que c'est que l'art ? C'est le Beau dans le vrai, et, d'après ce principe, l'art s'est créé des règles absolus, que vous chercheriez en vain dans la nature seule. Si la nature seule pouvait le satisfaire, vous n'auriez qu'à mouler un beau modèle de la tête aux pieds, pour faire un chef d'œuvre. Ou, si vous exécutiez cette idée, vous ne produiriez qu'un grotesque. Le talent consiste à compléter la nature, à recueillir çà et là ses indications merveilleuses, mais partielles, à les résumer dans un ensemble homogène et à donner à cet ensemble une pensée ou un sentiment, puisque nous pouvons lui donner une âme.

I am in sympathy with that view so far as it implies that the artist cannot be content with a slavish

PASSIONS SPIN THE PLOT

reproduction of isolated facts taken from nature ; and that he sets his gaze upon "*le Beau dans le vrai*," which I should like to render, not the "beautiful in the true," but the "Ideal in the true." But I am not in sympathy with it so far as it implies a formal beauty which the artist discerns in accordance with a principle mysteriously and exclusively artistic, existing in a region remote from life. Art is not a sacred mystery into which only the initiated can penetrate. It is not concerned with beauties drawn from a peculiar and exclusive artistic Absolute. Literature deals with life, but in life in an intense manifestation, with that passionate life which attains its richness, its breadth, its tremendous lustiness through the desire for something more than normal life can give. Nobody can object that these ideals are not real, that they are not true to life, and indeed the most vital part of life. The passions they call forth in men are the most real, the most vivid, the most illuminating ; they widen and refine experience ; they bring us into a larger universe, they add to the stature of personality, they are the means of growth.

Literature is an expansion of the mind out of the narrower truth into the larger. It despises no experience, but drags to light its hidden resources, its unexpected wealth. It is profoundly interested in experience on its intense, that is to say, its passionate side. The original mind, not content to find poetic value in a single emotion such as that of love, finds it on all sides, discovering interests here, there, and everywhere. If it concentrates on one of these for the purposes of a poem, a play, a novel, it neglects,

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

of course, no adventitious aid which gives reality to the persons, sufficiency to their motives, contrast, relief, atmosphere—all that is expressed by the ordinary jargon of criticism. To sum up : great creative literature does not deal with things painful or otherwise merely because they are facts of life. Its business is the intensification of life, to bring home to us its myriad finenesses ; it achieves this end by presenting persons passing through the intense experiences which we call passions ; and these are conditions of the spirit in which an idealised object encourages, thwarts, or tantalises the seeker, and dejects him utterly if the reality turns out to be less than the ideal. The inquiry opens a question for the metaphysician—What is the source of this ideal element which enters into every object passionately sought, and so transcends realisation that the object cannot be attained without a sense of loss ?

IV

THE POPULAR TASTE

IF anything is worse than bad literature it is the tedious Pharisaism of the "man of culture." How flattering to the self-esteem to cast a supercilious eye upon the melodramatic, sentimental, unbeautiful books which constitute the mass of modern literature ! The mass of modern literature is provided for the mass of men and women, but history has proved that a small and educated public may embrace stupidities not less desiccating than the stupidity of the million. A cultured public in the eighteenth century which could tolerate Colley Cibber gains nothing by comparison with an uncultured public which delights in Hall Caine. An author who attempted a poetic drama in the eighteenth century had to conform to the rules, but his compliance with convention is worth no more to literature than the libertinism of the modern reporter. The correct taste of that period is sufficiently flagellated in Swift's *Recipe to make an Epic Poem*, wherein he "makes it manifest that epic poems may be made without genius, nay without learning or much reading. . . . It is easily brought about by him that has a genius, but the skill lies in doing it without one." To this day there exists an oligarchy of academic persons whose taste is almost exactly on a par with the taste

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

most in evidence two hundred years ago. They are the people who estimate literature by its correctness rather than by its fineness or power, who are impregnable in their little fortress of pedantry, and are for ever secure against the attacks of original genius.

If, then, we find that there is much in modern popular literature that we dislike, this is a very different thing from saying that we prefer the technical banalities dear to the pedant, or would set up the standard of a barren culture. The popular taste is something not to be scoffed at, but to be accounted for. To complain of it is wasted effort ; to explain it would be something to the purpose. And this we can only do by keeping in mind that vital ideal which in spite of every set-back the world has contrived to preserve, and endeavouring to discover what it is—short of that ideal, or remote from it—that the modern public wants : what taste it is that hundreds of modern authors are trying to satisfy.

It is evidently a very various taste, for it is the taste of the whole people. Everyone in the modern civilised state has been taught to read, and almost everyone has had the written word thrust upon him ; so that reading has become a habit. At every turn the eye falls upon the printed advertisement, the printed leaflet, the hand-written letter ; and the habit which is developed by the necessities of life has intertwined itself also in the amenities. Newspapers, and weekly and monthly periodicals, adapt themselves to the tastes of every class in the community. The time is still far distant when books will be universally and systematically read ; but the number of

THE POPULAR TASTE

volumes annually distributed has increased at least tenfold in the last generation ; and a large proportion of this literature must find its way to strata of society which fifty years ago read nothing at all.

It would be too much to expect that these millions of recruits to the reading public would be drawn to that literature which can be classed with the fine arts. One would no more expect them to admire it than one would expect a child of five to admire *Hamlet*. The astonishing thing is, not that so few people appreciate the best literature, as that so many—*under direction*—are open to its influence, as we may see from the immense sales of those popular volumes which Mr. Ernest Rhys and others guarantee to be genuine “classics.” Unfortunately, in the case of recently written books, Mr. Rhys is not always at hand. In such cases there is little direction for docile disciples of culture excepting such as is given in newspaper reviews, and reviews are as likely to misdirect and confuse as to encourage and guide.

But although this considerable and growing public of ambitious readers already exists, and may some day come to the support of original literature, it is at present easily swamped by that heterogeneous public for which the largest number of books are provided. That majority, in the nature of things, is unable to give the concentrated attention, still less the selective appreciation, which literature of the higher order requires. There is nothing to encourage them to concentrate. The newspaper, the popular magazine, the theatre, the moving-picture show, and the whole shifting, rapid panorama of modern life

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

discourage concentration. There are readers who can only give the odds and ends of their time to reading. Most of them are devoting the best efforts of their brain and attention to their business, household duties, their social and domestic affairs, and they turn to books only when their minds are fatigued and in need of repose. That is to say, they read not for a renewal of activity, but for distraction. With them, books satisfy the desire, not for an enhancement of life, but for the forgetting of it. Their literature is at the most a stimulant which excites without giving active play to their faculties; it presents nothing which connects with life or ideas, nothing even to call forth the effort demanded by their practical affairs.

There are others, for the most part women not of the working class, who support with apparent earnestness the purveyors of popular fiction and biography, and even patronise poetry and genteel social philosophy. Amongst them are to be found those to whom the sterner actualities of life are unfamiliar and repugnant, for whom the practice of trifling with books is rather an ornament than an occupation, a mode of killing time rather than using it. They, too, read to be distracted, choosing an emasculate literature which panders to their essential dilettantism.

Now those who regard literature as an important thing, playing a significant part in the life of a nation, must, as I have already indicated, seek in it something more positive than a *distraction* from life; for them it must be an *addition to life*. It must provide

THE POPULAR TASTE

experience compounded of the same stuff as other experience ; but not having the vividness which the direct impact of life carries with it, it must gain its vividness by an intensity, a fineness, an interest of its own—by a distinctive quality distilled into it from the personality of the writer. It is imagination which achieves this, the faculty so apprehensive of life that it can fashion life into images which are projections of the artist, his own stamp upon the stuff of life. To such an author literature cannot be a mere amusement or profession. It deals with what he conceives to be the most essential things in the world ; it is his rendering of the world, his perspective ; and it is just in so far as he has made this, his ideal and real world, appreciable also to us, that he has succeeded in his art. Such imaginative reconstruction of the facts of life, such impregnation of life with fineness, calls for alertness of faculty in the reader, demands from him something of that eagerness to perceive which characterises the artist himself. But how can the tired worker seeking distraction, or the idle dilettante seeking only a drug or a stimulant, muster that alertness of faculty and that eagerness to perceive which are needed for the appreciation of art ? It is not to be expected. A coarser appeal will produce all that such minds are able to assimilate. For good reading, like good writing, requires the energy of men not robbed of leisure, men who can enjoy some respite from the commonplace.

And yet it often happens, as we shall see, that those who have succeeded in distracting the many have put into their work some fineness which com-

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

mends it also to the few. It is only in theory that there is a fixed boundary between works of art and the works which Philistines enjoy. In practice, merit and demerit exist side by side ; works crude in conception reveal a hundred finenesses, and works fine in conception reveal crudenesses of execution. And just as there are authors who mingle good and bad in their books, so too there are readers who enjoy certain kinds of excellence though they can be vulgarly excited by the cruder devices. And again there are persons who appreciate to some extent genuine works of art, who in moments of fatigue or jaded appetite can be diverted by the mere appeal to sensation.

The clever publisher knows well that the public for whose distraction he caters is divided into many classes, and that these classes must be attracted each in a special way. For the purposes of my argument I group these under five different heads, which are probably not exhaustive and certainly not mutually exclusive, but correspond, I think, to the five chief means of exciting and distracting the multitude. The two largest classes constantly overlap, consisting : firstly, of those whose love of sensation is satisfied by violent incident ; and secondly, of those who are especially susceptible to the sentimental appeal. To a third class belong those who take pleasure in the agitations of sex feeling ; and to a fourth, those whose sense of humour is tickled by the sallies of the literary clown. The fifth class—a very large one—consists of those who are of a habit of mind to be excited by sensations which can be

associated with religion and morality. It is useless to name as a sixth class those who are moved by intellectual ideas, for so small a class is not the objective of the popular author.

I. All novels must to some extent depend upon incident and arrangement of incident, but there is a kind of novel which only interests through the excitement of events in their nature fictitious, even when accidentally true. Any really good book which may be spoken of as a "novel of incident" will invariably prove to be very much more. To take the case of Fielding's *Tom Jones*, one observes that it is an imitation of life which is neither a slavish copying nor a make-believe, but a vivid representation of eighteenth-century England as Fielding saw it; it is a book which presents characters, and itself has a character. Its atmosphere is quite unmistakable. It is not a "slice" out of the eighteenth century—there can be no real "slice out of life" excepting in life itself. It is Fielding's rendering of the eighteenth century, in particular it is his assertion of the *physi-cality* (if I may use the term) of life, a direct assertion of the boisterous physical vitality which, as Fielding presents it and as Marlowe presented it, acquires value for the spirit and is acceptable to the imagination. It is the original pagan assertion of life, which finds its opposite in Euripides' conception of the ascetic Hippolytus; an assertion which Propertius repeated in the language of mockery when he speaks of a *lena* as

"Docta vel Hippolytum Veneri mollire negantem."
Even Euripides himself was so infected with the

pagan view that he sees a sort of Nemesis pursuing the hero whom the slighted Aphrodite reproaches with lack of reverence—religious reverence—for her power. This primitive pagan view, crude, non-moral, but essentially sincere, animates the story of Tom Jones and gives it a character which is lacking in the popular “novel of incident.”

Tom Jones was and is a popular book. But I hope I am not wronging the larger mass of mankind when I say that those (of the majority) who like Fielding do not like him for his unique excellences; they would be equally pleased if puppets instead of vital persons had passed along the same course of exciting events; and that there are others who would not read him even if he began writing to-day, because his picture of life is too consistent with his imagination, and this very tenacity would perturb and irritate the trivial. Nevertheless he would have many readers among a large minority, just as Mr. Arnold Bennett has to-day—readers who can appreciate a story which is direct, vivid, and mainly external in treatment.

But the largest public is for writers like Mr. Cutcliffe Hyne or Mr. William Le Queux. These more nearly represent the popular ideal in a “novel of incident.” For the former I have some respect. He shows ingenuity in his concoction of improbable plots. In *Captain Kettle* there is at least some attention to character—of a freakish kind—and something of atmosphere which gives it a mock-romantic interest. It holds the multitude by reason of the thrilling sensations extracted from incidents wholly unlike any-

THE POPULAR TASTE

thing possible in their lives, but near enough to reported facts to be able to astonish and excite them. Such improbable but ingeniously contrived events are enough to distract them, and if there be more in Mr. Hyne's stories imparted by his personal eagerness and honesty, it escapes them, or at least does not annoy them.

But this finer quality has been lacking in such of Mr. Le Queux's books as I have chanced to read. I may have been unlucky in my selection, and there may be admirable qualities in those of his novels which I have not read. But in the three or four volumes known to me I found that the persons were puppets, moving in unnatural situations, meeting sensational adventures which constituted all that there was of an improbable and slenderly connected plot. We all know the sort of book. But what is it that makes this, and others like it, popular? There were scenes of spurious passion. There were incidents in which action assumed the proportions of prodigy. There was vague sensation. In one of his novels I found an introduction by Lord Roberts warning Englishmen to prepare for the German invasion planned by Mr. Le Queux for 1910! History has not yet revealed the horror and devastation of that war; but this horror and devastation lent to Mr. Le Queux's book the interest which it required.

Yet the novel which is read mainly for the thrill of the incident may be written in a far finer spirit. Most historical novels depend mainly upon the vigour of the action. The very best historical novelists must be excepted; in Scott, for example, as in Fielding,

there is so much which depends on character and atmosphere that there is always much more than thrilling incident to hold the attention. In the books of a modern writer like Mr. Ford Madox Hueffer, at his best, there is an artistry of composition, a synthetic quality in the romance, a unity of pictorial effort which give to them a quality of design and exquisiteness ; they are a distillation of Mr. Hueffer's romantic personality. But if we consider Mr. Stanley Weyman, we are taking a novelist in whom everything depends upon the thrill of incident. Still, he has made of his work a fine craft. He uses words conscientiously. He has exceptional skill in tracing his ingenious plots. He has read history carefully, and for the most part adheres faithfully to facts—though I believe he is not so well instructed in German as in French history. The scrupulousness which refines his work gives quality to his narrative, and he can be read with pleasure by persons of exacting taste. And, again, we might take the case of Richard Dehan, author of *The Dop Doctor*. That writer is not innocent of the crudest melodrama. She is diffuse, extravagant, formless. But she has imagined and created certain characters. She has at moments touched profoundly that most rudimentary of all emotions—the war-emotion—an emotion which may be experienced intensely by every member of an energetic community, and therefore affords the basis of a real popular art—just as certain universal sentiments afforded the basis of folk-songs, which were constantly taken up and moulded into fine artistic forms. *The Dop Doctor* is a book compounded of

THE POPULAR TASTE

vulgar sensationalism on the one hand, and a strange imaginative vigour and actuality on the other.

But the sensibility of the crudest and, it is to be feared, the (at present) largest strata of society can be touched, as we have seen, by the sheer extravagance of the novel of incident, by action distorted out of the proportions of life and made astonishing, by violent assaults upon the reader calculated to arouse him like pistol-shots, since a more moderate appeal would escape his attention. Just as a donkey with a hard mouth can only be guided by violent jerks upon the reins, so a dull sensibility can only be awakened by the harshest literary appeal. Style in such cases must adapt itself to the subject. Redundant words are heaped up where one would suffice for the trained intelligence. A multitude of violent, flamboyant phrases assist to the excitement of fever. It is possible, indeed, that some rudimentary art-feeling lurks behind this pandemonium of crude literature, more probably in cases where lawlessness is the result not of indolence, but of some sort of vigour and spontaneity. But it should be remembered that the mimetic impulses in which art among primitive races is supposed to originate, are not themselves art ; and continually to whet the appetite with such primitive exercises is to perpetuate the rudimentary condition and stifle the finer faculties.

II. The sentimental absurdities of Pyramus and Thisbe are the occasion of some apt criticism which Shakespeare puts into the mouths of Hippolyta and Theseus :

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

HIPPOLYTA. This is the silliest stuff that e'er I heard.

THESEUS. The best in this kind are but shadows ; and
the worst are no worse, if imagination
amend them.

HIPPOLYTA. It must be your imagination then, and not
theirs.

Shakespeare is commenting on the sentimentality which is generally pleasing to Quince, Snug, Bottom, and the like. If he is mistaken it is in suggesting that this sickliness is confined to the company of carpenters and bellows-menders, and is not equally to be found among those of the high estate of Hermia, Helena, and Hippolyta herself. But it would never have done to admit so much before an audience of tinkers and tailors, splendidly patronised by a few young bloods of noble birth. Sentiment is distinguished from sentimentality precisely as Shakespeare suggests. The one is concerned with real emotions, the other with shadows. The first is informed by the imagination, the second is devoid of it, and is divorced alike from intellect and common sense. To touch the chord of sentiment justly and truly is one of the most difficult things in literature. Shakespeare himself by no means always succeeded. There is often an affectation in his lighter love-scenes which destroys the impression of sincerity. Even in life one may see how at any time the note of sentiment may be turned to absurdity by the least discordant element. The lover whose tender expressions are wholly pleasing to his lady may become an object of ridicule before an uninvited audience. Everyone can remember some occasion when a whole company of persons, wistfully alluding to a recent death, has

THE POPULAR TASTE

suddenly burst into uncontrollable laughter, betraying, not lack of respect for the dead, but ridicule at some falsity of expression.

Sentiment is one of the everyday emotions, fine and light in its texture, requiring the tenderest and most delicate treatment, and often it must pass off in laughter. It is something less than passion. It is not concerned with tragedies or crises, but the subtlest apprehensions of what comes and goes at every moment of life. It must never be treated as if it were passion, or the slender threads of which it consists will snap, and ridicule will justly reveal the unbalanced judgment of the sentimentalist. Nor must it ever be far from laughter, or it will collapse under its own strain, and we may be betrayed into thinking that the cynic is the best judge of life. It is the imagination exercising itself among things real, but not of the first order of importance. If you attribute to them that importance, you are guilty of false sentiment. The facts of life convict you.

See how delicately Charles Lamb could hold the balance in such an essay as *Dream Children*. Great-grandmother Field is just in her place, upright, graceful, and the best of dancers ; and Alice's little right foot plays its involuntary movement in the nick of time ; and when Uncle John died, the " children fell a-crying " at the narrative and asked about the mourning which they were wearing. It is all just important enough, just trivial enough, to carry its fragile burden of sentiment—so much, and no more. The charm is complete. Conceive what Dickens would have made of the story if he had been writing

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

it! How sickly a fantasy of Paul Dombey and Little Nells and garrulous "wild waves" he would have conjured up for *his* dream children! His dream children—the good ones, at any rate—were little old people, monstrosities, freaks. Reality rejects monstrosities, and what reality rejects is no subject for literature—strictly speaking, is no subject at all—save when, like goblins and fairies, it assumes the quasi-reality of fantasy and dreams.

I remember a story by a popular modern writer, Mr. E. Temple Thurston. It appeared in a volume entitled *Thirteen*. The author arranged his story with skill. He led up to his *dénouement* with admirable stage-management. The story was about a little boy who understood that his father wanted a shop and fifty pounds to buy it with. This amiable child sallies forth from his poor quarter of the city and tramps to the distant regions where rich people live. Nothing doubting, he asks for fifty pounds. He receives sixpence. He exchanges it for a pair of braces and an insurance ticket. He drowns himself with exquisite deliberation, and on the merits of his death and the insurance ticket the fifty pounds are forthcoming.

The defects of the story are obvious. The little boy has no proper place in this world, and his drowning, so far from being pathetic, was the best thing that could happen to him. For he was a freak, a monstrosity. Even those who may not accept this view must at least agree that he ought to have known better, and deserved a whipping rather than the reward of martyrdom and sentimental praise. But

even if we assume that the boy is a possible creature, and that his act in begging for the money was beautiful and moving, we cannot escape the objection that the fatal ending is pitched in a discordant note of tragedy. The tragic conclusion is appropriate to a tale of passion, or to a tale which arouses a sense of the most urgent things in life. But to turn a slender sentiment into a thing of tragedy is to pass the limits of sentiment ; it cannot carry the burden. The conclusion is not true enough to be even shocking. It is merely disgusting.

How is it that this mimicry of sentiment proves effective in moving the multitude, when the real thing so often fails to please ? The answer, I think, is, that the artistic imagination can neither express itself through distorted objects, nor can it confuse in one blurred series of images the trivial and the urgent ; its business being to see life with such sense of proportion as the concentrated artistic vision of the artist ensures. But careless readers do not see objects until they are exaggerated out of resemblance to life ; the adjustments of the artistic vision are too delicate to reach their perceptions. Mr. Thurston's little boy is seen to be very good, and to the sentimentalist his mere goodness is " beautiful." When he tramps across London his fatigue is sad, and the sadness of it is beautiful. When the rich gentleman gives him sixpence instead of fifty pounds, the reader sheds happy, thoughtless tears, and his beautiful death at the end is all that he requires as the final " assault upon his feelings." The phrase, of course, is Stevenson's, and it can hardly be avoided. Popu-

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

larity rewards the writer who can *assault* the feelings of his readers, and anyone who uses a more delicate method must be content with a smaller circle of readers.

It is in this manner, amiably enough, that Miss Ella Wheeler Wilcox can conquer America with sentimental poems, as Ian Maclaren once conquered England with sentimental stories. They touch us where the intellect and the common sense are in abeyance, and the moral sense is steeped in false sentiment. Thus it was that when a sort of torpor came upon the intellect and the common sense of Mr. A. C. Benson, he, who had been formerly a scholar and a friend of literature, became merely a sentimentalist. The author of *The Sick-a-bed Lady* (Eleanor Halliwell Abbott) is for the same reason esteemed as highly in America as the author of *Letters to My Son* is esteemed in England. The trowel is the instrument with which these honours—and these fortunes—are won.

III. It might seem that the popular literature of love ought to have been treated under the same head as that of sentimental literature. But it will become clear not only that there can be a popular erotic literature of a quite different order, but that I might have subdivided this class into two: one concerned with the popular literature of passion, the other with that of sensualism. There is, of course, a sentiment of love which is sufficiently considered in the last section. But I have made a distinction between sentiment and passion, which for my view is important; and I must add the further and more obvious distinction between the love passion, which

THE POPULAR TASTE

is an intense emotional experience affecting the imagination no less than the senses, and that sex feeling, which in essence is merely sensual. Leaving out of count, then, the "sentiment" of love, we have an obvious distinction between the literature which deals with the love passion and the literature which deals with sensual desire. But I do not propose any grandmotherly legislation which permits one subject to the artist and relegates the other to the pornographer. For it is clear that an author may deal well or ill with a subject intended to yield genuine passion (though in the latter case the popular interest will attach to the sensational character of the incidents rather than to the treatment of passion as such, and a book of this kind may be considered as I have already considered the "novel of incident"). And, again, an author may deal well or ill with the sensations of sex; those sensations can provide material for fine art. It is a matter of treatment. Upon feelings of this sort Maupassant based some of his most felicitous stories. But Maupassant did not use sexual incidents for the sake of sex feeling; for him such incidents were various symbols, flickering images, of life, incarnations of the brooding spirit of cynicism and scorn. We have already seen that to Fielding, for whom they were of less special significance on their own account, they were presented as assertions of boisterous physical eagerness, of delight in energetic life for its own sake.

It has already become obvious that the tendency of the most popular literature is to substitute the cruder sensations for the higher emotions and senti-

ments. We have seen how incident is liked for the mere sensation it can afford ; how sentiment is turned into sentimentality. As a rule, in discussing inferior literature the higher emotions need be taken little into account. But in the case of love it is different. The average man, by reason of his pre-occupation and his averageness, is little affected by a variety of fine emotions ; the hard facts of life smother them. But everyone can observe that the emotion of love is not only an emotion to which most men at a certain age are susceptible, but that it seems to present itself, at some time or another, in a form finer than that of any other feeling entertained by average men. I believe that all observers would agree that innumerable men and women who cannot be touched in a subtle way by any other emotion—unless we except, especially in primitive men, the emotion of war ; and then it is rather intense than subtle—can be and are so touched by the emotion of love.

Here, then, we might expect to find the basis for a literature which may be both widely popular and at the same time finely imagined. Within certain limits I believe the love passion does afford such a basis. If we can imagine an artist confining himself to this single issue, relying on no finenesses outside it, then we might have a work of art which men and women, representing in other respects any degree of imagination and dullness, might all almost equally enjoy. In practice it is seldom that an artist is content to confine himself so exclusively to this issue ; it is not in the nature of the imaginative temperament to limit itself in that way. But I think we have an

example approximating to the supposed type in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. The strenuousness of the love emotion is in this book rendered with consummate power, and hence the hold it has over men of intelligence and over fools. But in almost every other respect the novel is sheer rhetoric, crudeness, and unshapeliness.

The novel (or popular biography) which deals not with the emotion of love but the sex sensation, requires little discussion. If the object of the writer is to treat such a theme with imaginative criticism, well and good. If he intends only to reproduce the sensation, he is a pornographer.

IV. It is extraordinary that there should be so little humorous literature distributed among the English-speaking peoples, for a sense of humour is a boon which has been allotted to a very large minority of the human race, and some sense of the ridiculous to the majority. It is through his sense of what is ridiculous in life, and his power of presenting it imaginatively, that Dickens seems to have acquired not only a permanent place in English literature, but a popularity quite unique among standard English novelists. The jocularity of Mark Twain is equally dexterous, but it is not so completely imagined as the humour of Dickens; it springs more often from situation than from character, and to that extent belongs more to the accidents than to the essentials of life. Mr. W. W. Jacobs deserves a higher place than is usually accorded to him in contemporary literature. His short stories are excellently contrived within their limits; the humour springs from situa-

tion and character conjoined. When a clever writer is content to confine himself primarily to the ridiculous in life, it is possible for him to make his effect both for the million and the more exacting few. As *Wuthering Heights* was popular because it was little more than a brilliant presentation of the love passion, so *Many Cargoes* and *Light Freights* are popular as well as excellent because they aim at nothing but the broad effect of laughter. Mr. Jacobs is inferior to Dickens because he is a humorist and nothing more, and also because he has an infinitely narrower range. His art is one which presents but a single aspect of life, and suggests no ambition to exhibit a large grasp upon life as a whole. But he succeeded exactly in what he set out to do.

But have any of Mr. Jacobs' books, or any of Dickens', enjoyed greater popularity than fell to Mr. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat*? In this book the humour sprang in no sense out of character; nor did it even spring out of situations contrived with especial skill. It consisted of a series of ludicrous impressions such as that of a man sitting on a pat of butter. Well, a man sitting on a pat of butter is a funny thing—when it happens naturally in life. But a collection of incidents, each of which might be funny if it happened among the accidents of life, are a poor source of entertainment when strung together without the life which makes them real. It should be remembered that what is an accident in life ceases to be an accident when it is invented in a story. A writer must needs supply from the imagination something which may give the artistic effect of

accident. Even farce misses its true effects if it contains no verisimilitude. To see your friend sitting on a pat of butter is amusing ; to listen to an invented account of besmeared garments is not amusing ; for it misses the amusing point—which was the fact of its happening. But the admirers of *Three Men in a Boat* see only trousers and butter, trousers and butter ; and they find nothing offensive in the manner in which this incongruity has been thrust upon their sight. Their complacent minds receive this funny visual impression because they do not perceive the glaring artifice which for another banishes the humour.

V. Morality among the Anglo-Saxon races is a popular theme. It can cover a multitude of artistic sins. Religion is popular in all countries, and is not always associated with good morals ; but in England and the United States good religion and good morals fall under the same hierarchy. Both have their corresponding sensations and emotions. We may see them violently operative at revival meetings, distracting agents which are sometimes indeed so powerful as to lead to extraordinary reactions. It is difficult to attain the same violence with the written as with the spoken word, but if any living novelist has succeeded in attaining the effect of pandemonium through the use of religious and moral subjects, it is Miss Marie Corelli. As *proxime accessit* I might name Mr. Hall Caine. By the same methods Mr. Guy Thorne (*alias* Ranger Gull) attained, with the pulpit assistance of the Bishop of London, a sensational popular success in *When it was Dark*. There have

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

also been many fine writers who did not aim at spurious effects, but received praise by reason of their "moral tone" in circles where they would never have received it on the grounds of literary excellence. If George Eliot had not been a moralist she would not have been so popular in England. If Ruskin had not been primarily a preacher he could never have wielded his vast influence. Tennyson was beloved as much for his moralism as for his sweetness; and to-day so admirable a writer as Mr. John Galsworthy is, even in "serious" circles, regarded as a serious novelist mainly because he is a critic of morals. Mr. John Masefield wrote many novels and plays in which he showed singular fineness of feeling and beauty of style. But when he wrote a poem called *The Everlasting Mercy*—a story of thrilling incident with an admirable moral—lo! his popular reputation was made! People could understand a story of sensational incident. They could understand the moral. They flattered themselves that they were enjoying poetry!

.

If anyone should reproach me with adopting the tone of that odious thing the "superior person," and should declare that I underestimate the intelligence and good sense of the majority of readers, my reply is that the finest literature is not that which is most read, and I am compelled to conclude that the finest ideas are not those which are most often embraced. To assert this is not to disparage the common sense and the practical intelligence of the mass of mankind. I believe that they are capable of vast activity

THE POPULAR TASTE

and eagerness, much of which runs to waste through the fatigues of excessive labour ; much, through lack of training and mental stimulus, can find no congenial outlet through the mysterious processes of art. The outlet which the majority of men find for their superfluous energy is not through the channel of fine ideas. Such literature as they read is for distraction and not for the vigorous use of their faculties. It cannot be otherwise. That is the condition imposed by the fragmentary education alone vouchsafed to the majority of men and women, giving them no more than that modicum of learning which is a dangerous thing. And it is a matter of supreme importance because this new reading habit of the million has turned the energies of authors and publishers from the few to the many. It has introduced into the literary profession a demagogic habit, and has set up a quantitative instead of a qualitative standard.

PART TWO

LITERATURE AND MODERN LIFE

I

TO-DAY AND YESTERDAY

1.

“WE must read what the world reads at the moment,” said Dr. Johnson, giving the remark an ironical meaning when he added, “A man will have more gratification for his vanity in conversation from having read modern books than from having read the best works of antiquity.” Nevertheless, one great difference between the time of Dr. Johnson and the world of to-day is, that whilst the former lived in perpetual admiration of antiquity, we live in perpetual admiration of ourselves. Though Johnson agreed that Pope’s poetry was not talked of so much after his death as in his lifetime, he declared that it had “been as much admired since his death as during his life. . . . Virgil is less talked of than Pope, and Homer is less talked of than Virgil ; but they are not less admired.”

But in the intellectual circle which is most before the public to-day there is a tendency to despise the traditions of English literature and to worship only the idol of originality. In a paper largely devoted to literary matters I recently read a statement to the effect that many authors, indifferent to books, neither buy nor read them, whilst others positively dislike them. Mr. Shaw’s quarrel with Shakespeare has been of long standing, but at least

Mr. Shaw has done his old-fashioned rival the honour of reading him. Mr. Arnold Bennett, on the other hand, who is undoubtedly one of the most brilliant contemporary novelists, has declared, not without pride, that the only novel of Dickens that he had ever read was *Little Dorrit*, and this but recently, and that he considered him a greatly overrated novelist. The conclusion is not surprising, and the living author is no doubt confirmed in his opinion that the works of Mr. Bennett are of vastly superior merit.

This modern self-confidence is undoubtedly a healthy sign of intellectual activity and eagerness. It goes to show that authors are scrutinising keenly the life that is going on around them ; that they are interested in facts and things, and seeking to give them a larger reality in terms of ideas ; and we see that they are finding a similar response from the reading public. It was not without significance that all through the period of the great Coal Strike publishers reduced their output of books to the smallest possible dimensions, and especially refrained from issuing books of the highest class. I do not believe that this was merely due to the fact that in times of economic crisis there is a lack of pocket-money with which to purchase literature. The fact surely was that much of the attention which in many circles is given to modern books was drawn away by the stirring events that were happening in our midst. The study and contemplation of the Coal Strike were of precisely the same nature as the study and contemplation of original contemporary literature. For

that literature in its most characteristic forms is concerned with the problems and the structure of modern society.

If at the time of the Coal Strike we had inquired what English plays had recently called forth the most criticism and interest in intellectual circles, we should probably have named, first, Mr. Galsworthy's *Justice*, and secondly, his *Strife*. The latter was concerned with a situation exactly similar to that developed by the Coal Strike. The action of the drama took place in the middle of a great strike. Mr. Galsworthy presented typical characters representing owners and men, both acting on principle, both determined and irreconcilable, stubborn and loyal, both betraying human qualities fundamentally the same. I am not for the moment concerned with the conclusion drawn by the dramatist, but with the fact that the serious attention which is given to modern literature and drama is the same sort of attention as that given to the great social questions of our time.

2.

To search for hidden unities in the literature of an age is often to distort facts in the interest of theory. But there may come a point—and I think the most notable literature of the year preceding the Coal Strike marks such a point—when certain salient facts emerge so violently and so repeatedly from the written page that no one but the blindest can ignore or deny them. If one should take six books written in that period by six authors who are fairly representative of contemporary English literature—E. M.

Forster, Arnold Bennett, H. G. Wells, Granville Barker, Bernard Shaw, and John Galsworthy—there would be found one truth about them so obvious that it has been remarked by dozens of reviewers. It is that they are concerned with the same social problems as those which fall under the science of sociology ; that they advocate, criticise, or imply reforms scarcely less directly than do those for whom social reform is a profession.

But this, I think, is scarcely the most satisfactory way of putting the matter. The same truth may perhaps be expressed in wider and more significant terms by saying that the characteristic literature of to-day is the literature of change. The most vigorous writers are generally those who respond most to their environment, in the same sense that to such men everything must be full of suggestion, interesting, and matter for the interpretative mind ; though the greatest of all are those who nourish themselves at all the sources of inspiration, in the past and the present, in the seen and the unseen. The latter are in consequence not so purely representative of their own special time as are those vigorous, active minds which fill a secondary place in the world's literature, but bulk largest to their contemporaries. Shakespeare is not so representative of the Elizabethans as is Marlowe or Chapman. Probably if a greater number of Greek plays survived we should find that Sophocles is less characteristically Athenian than Euripides. And in the same way Mr. Joseph Conrad is not so representative of the contemporary world as is Mr. Bernard Shaw or Mr. Wells. But it is in men of the

latter type that we shall find the qualities by which their epoch is differentiated from others, the qualities which to some extent appear in the greatest, which appear far more abundantly in those biggest only in contemporary estimation—which in any case mark the trend of thought and the peculiar contribution of the time. The literature produced by men of this type is most profoundly impressed by what may be called the spirit of change.

The briefest consideration of contemporary literature is sufficient to prove how powerfully these minds have been moulded, either by observing this fact of change or contemplating its possibility. The fact itself may perhaps best be illustrated by the case of Mr. Edmund Gosse and the story told in his memorable book, *Father and Son*. As a piece of biography alone that book stands high, for the fine drawing of the mind and character of the father. But the noticeable point lies in the vivid contrast between the father and son, the transition from the hard-headed, scrupulous, rigid, narrow-minded Puritan, who is so typical of the Victorian age, to the broad-minded, cultured *littérateur* of to-day. There is the fact of change—the Rev. Philip Gosse of forty years ago has become the Mr. Edmund Gosse of to-day.

If we would see how this actual change in the outward and inward order of the world has affected novelists we may turn to Mr. Arnold Bennett, Mr. Wells, or Mr. E. M. Forster. In *Clayhanger*, as in *Old Wives' Tales*, Mr. Bennett traces the progression of the English world from the generation of our grandfathers to our own generation; he shows this

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

change creeping upon us at an accelerated pace, catching the older inhabitants unawares, a visible change in bricks and mortar, in widening streets, in enlarged factories, in the introduction of trams which in due course became electric trams ; and a change no less decisive in customs and habits, the older folk marvelling at the new-fangled independence of the young ; the whole being nothing less than a revolution which has descended with the sure but imperceptible advance of a glacier, so that within living memory the face and character of England have been altered. In *Milestones* he has more recently given us another account of the same historic progression.

And an exactly similar idea has captured the imagination of Mr. Wells. In *The New Machiavelli*, as in *Tono-Bungay* and other books, he tells the story of the rapidly evolving world in which his heroes have grown up ; of the ever-spreading suburbs stretching out their tentacles north and south and east and west, of the mushroom houses which arose without order or system, of the changing system of education, the changing ideas towards parents—everything spasmodic, growing, muddled. Similarly, Mr. E. M. Forster, in *Howard's End*, shows the old house so dear to the heart of Mrs. Wilcox, as the symbol of permanence in an unfixed society which is homeless, restless, changing. Even if we look abroad we shall find something of this same sense of the transformation in the order of things ; in America, Mr. Winston Churchill has written a series of novels to illustrate the successive phases in the American character ; and in France authors like M. Paul

Bourget and M. René Bazin emphasise respectively the change from aristocracy to democracy, and from the reverence of orthodoxy to the revolutionary secular spirit.

In a somewhat different way Mr. Galsworthy, Mr. Shaw, and Mr. Granville Barker are affected by the fluidity of their environment. Of Mr. Galsworthy I shall have something more to say, and need merely point out for the moment that in *Fraternity, Strife*, and especially *Justice*, the author is not merely indicating but advocating changes which, instead of being left to accident, are to be guided in accordance with a definite human purpose. Mr. Shaw is so minded that he preaches against change wherever he perceives it, and clamours for it when he perceives it not. Thus in *The Doctor's Dilemma* and the Preface to it, finding himself confronted with great changes in medical science, he denounces medical progress and its pretensions as a superstition and a fraud. In *Getting Married*, on the other hand, finding that the public is still often content with old-fashioned ideas of sex relations and home life, he ridicules "home life as we understand it," on the ground that it is "no more natural to us than a cage is natural to a cockatoo." I am not accusing him of any real inconsistency in thus alternating between conservative and revolutionary dogmas. He would doubtless hold that changes ought to have been made where there have been none, and that those which have occurred have not followed the course which he, or men gifted with similar foresight, would have prescribed.

It may be objected that the influence of change

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

upon literature is not only felt by our contemporaries, but has affected the literature of all times ; that it is the function of men of letters to be ahead of their contemporaries and to initiate ideas which are productive of change ; that the history of literature is the history of the progress of thought and imagination ; and that therefore the present age does not differ in this respect from others. To which I would reply that whilst other literatures have represented or initiated change, there has never been a time when so many of the best creative intellects have consciously concerned themselves with this process, making change of conditions either their artistic subject or their deliberate practical object. The reason, of course, is obvious ; there never has been a time when the world was undergoing such a startling and rapid transformation. It is true, the economic, material, scientific, and moral changes in the Athens of the fifth century came about quickly and drastically, and the reconstitution of intellectual and moral ideas mooted by the Sophists found a profound expression in the dialectic of the drama. How far the Elizabethans were influenced by the revival of learning and science, the discovery of the new world and the expansion of commerce, is a question I need not embark upon. But it will not be disputed that the face of the world has never in any known period of history been so changed out of all recognition as it has been by the scientific and industrial revolutions of the nineteenth century. The barbarian invasions which put an end to Imperial Rome can have had no outward and visible effect comparable

TO-DAY AND YESTERDAY

to that of the invasion of the machine. What wonder that the superficial, hurried reader of to-day finds little to satisfy him in the literature of the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, the former so much concerned either with religion or pleasure, the latter with the moral virtues or their opposites !

The Renaissance did not reach its moral consummation till the time of the French Revolution, its intellectual consummation till the nineteenth century, its material consummation till the twentieth century and thereafter. The growth of science first affected the imagination, for it was an emancipating idea ; its first offspring was Romanticism and the idea of liberty and democracy. But science as it progressed in the nineteenth century came, first with the machine and the whip, then with the machine and the moralist, at its elbow. But wherever and however it came, it transformed with lightning rapidity, just in that way in which Mr. Wells, Mr. Bennett, Mr. Forster, and Mr. Winston Churchill, the American, have indicated ; till the mere fact of its transforming became so remarkable and absorbing that that fact has almost exhausted the attention of three-fourths of the artists and intellectuals of our age.

So habituated then have we become to rapid change in the conditions of life that the first thing we postulate is further change. The rustic accustomed to the same food every day of his life does not criticise his fare ; it is the epicure, accustomed to variety, who is critical of the menu. The active mind which witnesses perpetual variety must be perpetually critical. To be aware that the conditions of to-day

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

are different from the conditions of yesterday and of to-morrow is, according to the temperament of the beholder, to lament the past or to hasten the future. In this respect the Radical and the Conservative are alike, that it is the perception of change which determines them, though it determines them in different ways, the one being affected by hope, the other by fear. Both are discontented with the present, the one because it falls short of the future, which he imagines, the other because it has departed from the security of the past, which he idealises. And, as we have seen, even the creative artist cannot escape from the fascination of this ever-changing environment, where the unsystematised present obtrudes its fresh discontents, and the unknown future is pregnant with possibilities of good and the alternative of unimaginable evil. All perceive that something must be done to direct the plunging course of this hydra-headed democracy which, as its onrush is in any case irresistible, may at any moment deviate from the path and fling itself headlong to perdition. When the guns are firing and the battle is joined and the cries of the wounded fill the air, there are not many who can sit down in the midst, like the German philosopher at the battle of Austerlitz, to contemplate the Absolute. Most of them, even though their function is art, rush out to join the *mêlée*; and this is why they incur the censure of the reviewers, making fiction and drama a branch of sociology.

But one seems to hear, distinguishable occasionally amidst the din, a low, faint murmur. This way madness lies. Is man, the master of his soul, to be thus

TO-DAY AND YESTERDAY

enslaved to his conditions? Is he to be tossed hither and thither by changes which he did not create, by ideas to which he did not subscribe, by a tempest he never wished to combat? Is there no quiet place of refuge wherein he may be at peace to live as his ancestors lived, and to cherish the humble ambitions which they cherished? The answer, in a certain sense, is "No." The conventions which served their purpose have in many cases lost their meaning; the duties our ancestors performed have lost their usefulness; the old bottles will not hold the new wine which our generation serves to us. And this is one reason why so many people rate and gibe at what they call the "muddle-headed British public;" because it cannot change its ideas so quickly as it is forced to change its conditions of life.

But is there not an important significance in the very fact which makes our intellectuals desperate with indignation, the fact that you cannot change the "public mind" so rapidly as you can change its tramway services, its government, or the place—the cellar, the crust of the earth, or the sky—in which it is to be housed? It is easier to take a man up in an aeroplane than it is to make him agree that his neighbour ought to run away with his wife, or that his sons ought not to read Thucydides. Even amongst those writers whom I have named there is beginning to arise a half-formed consciousness that amid all these changes in circumstances we must be careful how we admit changes in character and in mental calibre; a consciousness that we are in need of some fixed point by which the world may be

enabled to retain its sanity. Now there are two classes of people who believe in permanence: those who think that the world is the same always because they are too silly to open their eyes; and the very small class of those who have felt profoundly that all things are changing in something more than the Heraclitean sense, who have yet penetrated to the necessity of a permanence, of an organic human continuity, underlying the multiplex circumstances and ideas of our life.

And this brings me back to Mr. Forster and Mr. Galsworthy. "Howard's End," the old-fashioned house which gives its name to Mr. Forster's novel, is contrasted with the new buildings which are occupied and vacated, which spring up on all sides and are vicariously inhabited, which draw nearer and nearer to the garden and the wych-elm of "Howard's End." It is the symbol of permanence, of the old order which "connects" the past with the present, the personal and individual with the cosmopolitan and indifferent; it is the something sacred which neither an individual nor a nation can afford to neglect. Mr. Forster, impressed as he is with the need of change, directed instead of haphazard, nevertheless perceives that there are permanent elements, belonging to character, in our blood and our tradition, which cannot be ignored without peril.

Mr. Galsworthy, in *The Patrician*, is no longer the mere antagonist of the established order of things. He seems to have attained a sort of optimism strangely at variance with his earlier views; to have declared that running through all these conflicts, revolutions,

TO-DAY AND YESTERDAY

and evolutions there is and has been a certain national sense, a sort of collective reasonableness, which is constantly making itself felt, and being expressed in its best form by the leaders of opinion, the aristocrats of nature ; that the torrent runs, as it were, between solid banks ; that in the long run character triumphs over confusion.

3.

It would be folly to regret that the drama of modern life, of our swiftly evolving modern society, has become absorbingly interesting to so many of the best brains of the time. Although we may detect a serious limitation to literature, a didacticism alien to the disinterested spirit of art, still we cannot fail to see that a new sort of vitality, belonging rather to the moral sense than the intellect or the perceptions, has been infused into imaginative literature. Something, at least, which is fresh and real and vital has been introduced, exclusive of much that we have been accustomed to regard as excellent, but serving surely to give a distinctive and far from negligible character to the typical literature of our time. That typical literature, in its most important manifestations, is concerned with the events that are happening around us here and now—with ideas, largely partisan, that give meaning to them—with the purposes that direct and determine them. Criticism, if it is to be vital criticism, cannot dissociate itself from those ideas, nor look on with sublime indifference to opinions as to the true and the false, the desirable and the undesirable.

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

But when we have said that, we are also bound to recognise the drawbacks and serious limitations of the modern tendency. It includes—and we come back to the point at which we started—a tendency to dissociate modern writing from the continuous stream of English and world literature. Incidentally the didacticism of modern writers, and their absorption in the affairs of the moment, have not only served to make a breach between themselves and English literature as a whole, to the detriment of their perspective, but have also set a gulf between themselves and those of another school, for whom world literature is more important than the literature of to-day, for whom erudition and interest in the past are not to be lightly dismissed as academicism. I can imagine no greater disaster to letters than a breach between the literary originator and the man of learning. Such a breach can only mean that learning is cast back upon itself, loses humanity, and becomes academic; and that the author who despises or ignores erudition, and with it the sense of human continuity and permanence for which it ought to stand, tends to become opinionative and shallow. His work must lack the imaginative range, the mellowness, the beauty which cannot take form through instinct alone, which cannot be expressed by those who have not lovingly studied the models of antiquity and our own literature, who have not sought contact with the life of other times as well as with the life of to-day.

The great gain to literature in recent years is that it is more closely related to action and those general

TO-DAY AND YESTERDAY

ideas which lead to action. Its great corresponding defect—and this is immeasurable—is its loss in form, in universality, in that disinterestedness which is essential to art. Erudition, when it is humane, and even when it is merely academic, has, at any rate, always that disinterestedness which is essential alike to science and art. If it is humane—as it was, on the whole, in the Elizabethan age—its whole moral support, vast in this age of idol-worshippers, will be on the side of disinterested art and literature. We do not hope, or wish, that all authors should be men of learning—they should be of all sorts. But if authors and men of learning continue to be removed in sympathy, interests, and ideals, it is a sign that both are in a bad way.

II

PROFESSIONAL POLITICS

“TAKE my word for this, reader, and say a fool told it you, if you wish: that he who hath not a dram of folly in his mixture, hath pounds of much worse matter in his composition.” These words were written by an irresponsible fellow before the days of “responsibility” were inaugurated; before politicians had become a race apart, admired or execrated according to the temperament of the beholder; before writers were solemnly divided into men-of-letters, novelists, *littérateurs*, journalists, hacks, and professors; before physicians had become a close corporation of certificated benefactors; not, indeed, before lawyers had learnt to trade on human litigiousness, but before they had won the respect of the public for the disinterested exercise of their talents. The days of specialism have added to the sum-total of human knowledge; but they have diminished intercourse, they have made men more inaccessible to one another, they have promoted new groupings, new atmospheres, new officialdoms, new barriers and water-tight compartments.

The professional spirit has affected and infected the whole of modern society; we see its results in what we call the “disappearance of wit,” or the “loss of the conversational faculty,” or the “didactic habit,”

PROFESSIONAL POLITICS

or anything else implying regret for the individualism of the past. It means that our several callings have separated us, have made us into creatures of our profession, have established us on our own particular pedestals on which, as good statues, we must remain, and that our common humanity is an insufficient link between us. Our special knowledge, our special habit, our special highly-esteemed reputation, sets up a barrier which cuts us off from our fellows and destroys community of feeling.

The politician of mediocre capacity may know enough to cut a figure among his political associates only by judicious silence, or by talkativeness on those subjects of which others are ignorant. But put him among his non-political friends, and he is an oracle of wisdom upon the law and the Constitution. The doctor, who has forgotten his scientific principles but has picked up some empirical knowledge, has the advantage of experience and authority as against the layman for whom he prescribes. The lawyer, the civil servant, the professional theologian, and the diplomat are in the same position. They all know enough of their subject to be superior to those who know next to nothing of it. They know enough to have pedestals of their own ; to be on their guard ; to have a reputation to maintain ; to conceal the “ dram of folly ; ” to be, to that extent, artificial in their relations with men. They dare not betray the “ laughable blunder,” which, said Charles Lamb, is the test your neighbour giveth you “ that he will not betray or over-reach you.”

In the case of the chartered accountant, or the

stockbroker, or the pedlar, this special knowledge is not so damning a thing. No accountant, be he ever so limited, can be wholly contented with accountancy as an explanation or sum-total of life ; nor can the broker, however absorbed in his business, admit to his friends that the manipulating of stocks and shares is the only matter which should consume the interest of mortals. It is otherwise with the politician, the priest, the man of letters, the professional philosopher, and even the lawyer and the soldier. There is nothing human which may not enter into politics, religion or philosophy, or become the subject of literature ; the human complexion of the State may be transformed by the professional prejudice of the lawyer or the soldier.

Consider how, for democratic purposes, the Member of Parliament is made. There is no need to pay undue attention to the amusing exaggerations and distortions of Mr. Belloc and Mr. Cecil Chesterton. The Member of Parliament has been supported in his constituency by a group of local politicals who have a healthy enthusiasm for the party war-cry. The serious candidate is too experienced, too professional, to share those enthusiasms in precisely that form which they assume, at election time, in the minds of his supporters. I do not mean that he is less enthusiastic than they, a less whole-hearted backer of his party, but that, from the nature of his political experience, politics presents itself to him under a perspective which cannot be theirs. He leaves his constituency a specially ordained champion of political truth ; he arrives at Westminster a unit in the crowd.

PROFESSIONAL POLITICS

If we follow our member to Westminster we shall soon find that he has fallen into the Parliamentary manner ; that his ideas are grouped around the ideas familiar to the House of Commons ; that he has taken its tone, and that his habits are becoming gradually assimilated to the habits of those few with whom he especially associates himself. Let us attend a meeting of some propagandist committee comprising a number of expert politicians—Members of Parliament, or others. We shall find there the bond of a common knowledge, a common sympathy, a common approach towards a given subject, a common jargon. We shall be aware of the fact that we have come into a particular, highly-specialised atmosphere, where the familiar language of ordinary life, the familiar ideas, would be intrusions, meriting nothing but frowns or compassionate smiles.

And the same thing is true of most corporate journalism and most corporate religion. The atmosphere is highly specialised ; it is binding ; and those who live in it believe it to be co-extensive with the whole of life. Let us bind ourselves by Tolstoy ; let us agree to loosen ourselves by Nietzsche ; but, in any case let us agree to love our neighbour on the principle of a close corporation. The main influences which shape the modern world operate, for the most part, through intellectual groups ; each group can only be appealed to in a language familiar to it ; it can only act on principles (consciously accepted or presupposed) which are its very special property ; you can never touch it to the quick, in its corporate and active capacity, without accepting or appearing

to accept its collective prejudices. Its differentia is that which separates it from the unit of common humanity.

Thus we come to something more difficult to analyse than specialisation of work—a specialisation of sentiment, habits and morals, which makes people supremely sapient within a narrow sphere which they have appropriated, and so limited as to be blind in the broad field of ethics which lies outside their special ken. And yet it is through these groups, keen-eyed in one direction, blind in others, that the intellect, the reforming zeal, the earnestness, the idealism of the age, have to pass before ideas and vague aspiration can be transformed into action or effective influence. These groups are the main-drainage-system of modern life; they are the ordinary channels through which the business of the world has to pass, and its organised thought be directed. Take any one of these groups, and consider its differential character, its mode of apperception, its *éthos*, and you find it something deformed, twisted, strained in one direction, like a tree by the sea-shore. But take a few score of them, and imagine their qualities fused together, and the result would accord with the ideals of common humanity—ideals vaguely conceived, perhaps, but generous. It is just because the qualities of these groups, in politics, religion, social work, and to a lesser extent in literature, are not and cannot be fused together, but on the contrary, stand apart in water-tight compartments, so that the whole is like an elaborate system of checks to make each part inoperative, that, at a time when

the whole community is strangely alive with good will, the actual social achievement is beyond measure disappointing.

The test of success or failure is the degree of satisfaction afforded to the common man. By the "common man" I do not mean the inferior man, but the man who has not specialised himself out of his common humanity. If there is any interest which an honest lawyer can share with an honest fisherman, a decent cockney with a decent Bedouin Arab, he does it in virtue of this nobler "commonness;" it may include the interests of good fellowship, of delight in song or nature, of a belief in God, and a host of indescribable interests which do not belong to the mechanism and compulsory organisation of life; it includes some "dram of folly," some capacity for "laughable blunder" in intercourse between men. Culture may break in upon this "commonness" and destroy it. But it need not be so. Shakespeare has this commonness in a high degree; so have Johnson, and Goldsmith, and Lamb; all great artists have had it when their culture has not crazed them, or when they have not lifted themselves into an almost mystical absorption in exercising some gift of austere, monumental expression; in which case, like Milton, they scarcely belong to the category of humans; their food is ambrosial, and their wine is nectar.

The task of the inspired politician has become harder in proportion as the problem of government has become more intricate and more specialised. He must work through his machinery, which includes not only the administrative machine, but all those

groups, in and out of Parliament, limited by their ethical and sentimental specialities. He must be professional enough to appreciate the ground of their excellences, and "common" enough to discard their limitations. It is only when there are several such men, powerful enough to leaven politics and lead politicians, that modern democracy can have any shadow of reality—men who understand the rank and file of humanity, conversant also with the complicated machine and the contending groups of narrowly defined ideals, men fired with that constructive imagination which crystallises in common sense.

III

SPECIALISM IN RELIGION

It is significant that the name "Religion of Humanity" was given to a set of tenets which strictly speaking contained no religion at all. Positivism gained ground in middle-Victorian England not merely because Science and the theory of Evolution were in the ascendant, but still more because it was recognised that the orthodox Churches were out of harmony with modern life; that they were ministering neither to modern humanitarian feeling nor to humanity. Positivism survives to this day in the person of Mr. Frederic Harrison and a few others (including several of the leaders of the Young Turkish party); but it would by this time have been a powerful creed if it had been really a creed, if it had anything spiritual and *credible* to offer to those who are outraged by the professional neglect, self-absorption, and intellectual insincerity of the Churches. Everyone is aware of the failure of the Churches to touch modern life; to escape from their grooves; to cease to deal in conventional and monotonous iterations of old-fashioned formulæ instead of finding vital, human, developing expressions of the spiritual craving of man. Even Mr. George Cadbury is aware of this failure, as he showed by his zeal for the inquiry into church attendance some years ago,

an inquiry which has been repeated this year with results unsatisfactory to the Churches. The question has been debated again and again, and inquirers have been unable to make up their minds whether it is the Churches that are not good enough for the people, or the people who are not good enough for the Churches. It is a question of the priority of the chicken or the egg. It is not known whether public sentiment is depraved because it is alienated from the Churches, or whether the Churches are depraved because they have excluded so many of the most powerful moral forces of the time. Certain it is that they have offended by their exclusiveness; by the narrowing down of interest; by the cliquishness of those who are specialists in piety or ritual. We may observe their habit of mind in that narrow Victorian sect which converted Mr. Gosse's strong-willed and in many ways lovable father into an intolerant tyrant (as set forth in *Father and Son*); that lax and snobbish branch of the Anglican Church which failed to capture Mr. Bernard Shaw in his youth, because it stood only for a "class prejudice;" and those strange types of Christianity which, as Mr. Lowes Dickinson expresses it, find no disharmony between belief in a "Power that is supposed to have created the stars and the tiger" and "the sentimental, almost erotic character of many Christian hymns:

Jesu, lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly."

The evidence of those who have been estranged from the Churches is worth considering. We see

that Mr. Gosse was driven from them in his youth by their sectarian narrowness and unwillingness to face intellectual inquiry ; Mr. Shaw by the flippancy of the Irish Church, its class prejudice, its false respectability ; Mr. Lowes Dickinson, among other reasons, because at a time when men are learning to adapt the processes of Nature to their ends, when it becomes them to “ dwell less and less upon their weaknesses and more and more upon their strength,” the orthodox Christians assert that we are “ miserable sinners,” that “ there is no health in us,” when they “ ought to be too busy demonstrating in fact the contrary.” Members of the general public in one way and another have become accustomed to regard religion with an uneasy constraint ; there are harmless things which must not be said in the presence of a priest ; there is a pastorality about the minister which implies a flock and a coterie ; and Englishmen seldom mention the name of God without an appearance of apology or secret shame. Religion has become largely a matter of cliques, coteries, associations—of specialism in codes and casuistry.

I will not press the question whether the history of the Christian Church has not been the history of the perversions of Christianity. A distinguished Chinese author not long ago indicted the alleged un-Christian methods of our missionaries in China ; Dr. Halil Halid, a Turk, has pointed out that it is in the Christian countries that the Christian virtues of humility and disdain of wealth are least in evidence. What concerns us now is the feeling in formally Christian countries that in spite of Christianity the

Christian Churches have not taught that the Kingdom of Heaven is on earth ; they have not taught toleration and love ; they have urged us to ignore the present world in the interests of the next ; and because their own followers have refused to do anything of the kind they have isolated religion from practical life. I agree that many Churches, seeking to adapt themselves to modern needs, have organised social clubs, carried on political crusades, and rendered useful service in "rescue work ;" but even so they have rather tended to distinguish between themselves in their spiritual capacity and themselves in their secular capacity. The majority of people do not seem to find in the religious services of the Churches a note that touches their practical needs or their spiritual ideals. The most successful popular appeal has been made by those organisations which have endeavoured to add to the zest of life by exciting music, tuneful hymns, and buoyant rhetoric.

In our unprecedented age of incessant change, continuous revolution, and swift innovation, we have become accustomed to the idea that the social order can and must be altered, that men must take things into their own hands. The fatalism of the old orthodoxy is not for a people who see that things are accomplished by the human will ; such people are naturally impatient with those who entreat the Deity to do for them what they can very well do for themselves. The last of the great fatalists in English literature is Mr. Thomas Hardy. He was moved by the downfall of the old settled civilisation and the purposeless, vexing changes which swept like a hurri-

SPECIALISM IN RELIGION

cane on a nation now suddenly made conscious of its evil lot. He was aware of the "modern vice of unrest" at a time when the human will had not yet set itself to direct and organise change. Thus it was that he came to pronounce the last word about Fatalism, and, in so doing, to reduce it to absurdity. "The First Cause," as Sue Fawley perceived it, "worked automatically like a somnambulist, and not reflectively like a sage;" she blamed "things in general, because they are so horrid and cruel!"

Whatever one's theological views may be, no one to-day tolerates in the drama of life any god-of-the-machine. In Greece, art and religion went hand in hand, and this was possible because gods were like men and manifested themselves through Nature, not in a sphere outside Nature. No civilisation prior to our own experienced so rapid an evolution as Athens in the fifth century B.C.; but when that century was over, it was still possible for a philosopher to draw robust symbolical illustrations from the old mythology. The Modernists to-day are only applying a law of history when they say that religion must evolve with the evolution of human culture. In the first thirteen centuries, the Christian Church did in practice change and adapt itself to civilisation. As long as the world was conservative, a conservative Church could keep pace with it. The first cataclysm came at the time when civilisation was again rapidly changing, and Christianity only emerged torn and divided by the Reformation. But the world to-day is being altered far more rapidly than at the time of the Renaissance. It turns from the Churches, not be-

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

cause it is tired of the spiritual life, or of other-worldliness, but because, just as it demands of literature and art that they should appeal to the modern mind and heart, so it can be content with nothing less from religion. And it is just because the Churches have been too conservative, because they tend to tradition, formulæ, conventions, and manners which, retained beyond their time, assume the garb of unreality, that they are abandoned or slighted by the people—as they must continue to be slighted—until new prophets arise to present universal truths in a new and practical form ; to endeavour to preach religion as the great man of letters endeavours to represent beauty and truth.

IV

SPECIALISM IN WAR

ENGLAND is very near to the Continent of Europe, and we are accustomed to thinking of Western civilisation as one. Yet every time we cross the Channel we are reminded in some fresh way of the foreignness of foreign countries. The dwelling-houses of France, for instance, are different from the dwelling-houses of England in respect of the important fact that they are all to some extent fortified houses. Great and small houses alike are evidently built with a view to defence from within. If you take a country walk anywhere in Normandy you find that the gardens of the country houses have massive gates and high walls, the front door is like a portcullis, and the window shutters are barricades. The smallest cottages have great doors and window shutters, and if there is a garden, it is two to one that the wall is a real wall. And not only in the country districts, but in the towns, pre-eminently in Paris itself, each house or block of flats is so constructed as to defy the violent intruder.

It strikes us strangely, as we walk through the cities of France and reflect upon the reasons for these square doors and these guarded windows. We have suffered no recent invasion, we have had no bloody revolution. During the whole of the nineteenth

century our island has known nothing more violent than the Peterloo massacre or the Chartist riots. We have constantly had wars, but they have been distant wars, a matter for the hireling soldier, and not often dragging in the volunteer civilian. If we were disgusted when we heard the true story of the Crimea, we soon forgot the story. We were shocked again by the facts of the Boer War ; we had not thought that so many men could be so quickly killed, so many millions of money whittled away. But even the South African War never remotely seemed to threaten the security of our own islands. For the most part, the policeman has been enough. A light bolt and a key guard us against petty burglars ; we walk abroad unarmed—at the worst, we comment on the fact that it is well to carry a stick if we walk alone in Epping Forest. We have abolished duelling. We have forbidden prize-fights. Even the horse-whip has ceased to be the patrician's mode of redressing wrong. For assault, libel, slander, we have a remedy in the law courts. Even in our punishment of criminals, if occasionally we have to put a man out of the way by discreetly hanging him, we never subject him to the degradation of a whipping. Youthful barbarians at public schools still roll about and pummel one another, but the organised, stand-up fight, such as was fought in Tom Brown's schooldays, is discouraged ; public opinion is against it. From infancy we are taught to be peaceful, law-abiding citizens.

Most of us, then, know very little about physical violence. The shedding of blood is an unfamiliar

spectacle. If a man is knocked down by a motor-bus, we may or we may not feel human sympathy, but certainly we are physically shocked by the gruesome sight. We send men to the gallows, but we no longer watch their agony on Tyburn Hill. We despatch men to a frontier war, but we know little about their wounds. And yet, as of old, our martial ardour is aroused and we glow with patriotic pride when a regiment of soldiers marches past to the sound of music. As of old, the thought of any great European war excites us, even fascinates us. We know enough, indeed, to assure ourselves that a great war would mean economic ruin, that even a distant war between two foreign countries, such as Turkey and Italy, or Turkey and Bulgaria, will probably react unfavourably on our own trade. Yet the thought of a great war still profoundly interests the mass of Englishmen; they are fascinated; they almost long for news of the great, decisive, bloody battle which means a sensation, a spectacle, an acquaintance with something doing, a something strange, gruesome, violent, and vast.

I am not saying that the people of this country approved of the war which Italy thought good to wage against Turkey, or were pleased at the horrible slaughter in the Balkans. It is obvious, on the contrary, that they strongly disapproved. The "Great Illusion," so effectively exposed by Norman Angell, is no longer universally entertained. Capital has learnt the horrors of war, and organised labour has emphatically declared against it. And yet, though there were few English people who would not have

stopped the Turco-Italian war and mitigated the horrors of the Balkan war if they could have done so, it is manifest that there were few who did not revel in the sensation, just as some years ago even our most philanthropic classes deplored and revelled in the spectacle of Macedonian atrocities. A fire at a theatre, an appalling railway accident, and especially murder on a vast, heroic scale, attracts, in these peaceful days, certainly not less than in the days when barbarism was customary.

Now, violence and brutality are obviously one thing to a peaceful people and a very different thing to people accustomed to violence in their daily lives. Upon a man of sedentary occupation a prize-fight must have a very different effect from that which it will have upon men accustomed to the use of their fists. It is worth asking: What is this love of violence which moves the breast of the man of peace? What is this emotion which leads men to be heroic by proxy? Is it surviving physical excellence which reveals itself in this way, or is it a cumbrous atavistic relic like the appendix which the doctors remove? We see, for instance, enormous crowds gathering at the football matches where professional players show their prowess, and muscles trained and hardened for the fray. We know that there was a crowd looking forward to the Wells-Johnson contest. Contrast these events with a cricket match, where there is practically no violence. Whatever be the reason, any sportsman will testify to the fact that the crowd which goes to see cricket is generally a cricketing crowd, but that the crowd which goes to a cup-tie football match is

by no means in the same way a footballing crowd. In other words, so far as the onlookers are concerned, the cricket match is more truly a sporting event than is the professional football match or the Wells-Johnson contest.

Whatever the answer be, it is certain that when we beat the big drum of patriotism and set the guns firing, the thrill which it arouses in the vocal populace is different from the thrill in a people accustomed to violence and blood. We say the "vocal" populace, remembering that there is a portion of the population, very important to the community and growing in power, which is not facile in the art of self-expression. That portion of the population was in evidence at the time of the great Coal Strike, when it seemed actually on the verge of rebellion, when it actually committed violence to the horror and surprise of our peaceful middle classes. The fact is that the very poor are never so far from the violent life as are members of other classes. Violent deaths are not infrequent in factories, in coal-mines, in great building-works, in dockyards. The life of deprivation makes the passion of anger frequent ; among the poor blows are often exchanged, and the police are seldom called upon to interfere. Necessarily, from the nature of the case, the poor are more familiar with violence than are their richer and more conventional neighbours ; it is a natural thing for the more ignorant of them to fall back upon physical force, as they did at Liverpool. And so, too, just as they are more accustomed to petty war, they are less interested in war between nations. In Italy it was the

working-men who protested against the war with Turkey.

But it seems that the more educated and the more organised we become, the more we leave our affairs to be managed by professionals. When a nation declares for war, it declares for a war to be waged by its professionals, and it turns them on to do a job which, according to civilised practices, is a dirty job. And when it is fired with patriotic pride for achievements won in the field it is exercising its emotions on something it cannot understand or realise, for the simple reason that the violence of war is strange, distantly horrible, fascinating, but unfamiliar. It has never directly entered into our experience.

V

SPECIALISM IN LITERATURE

SOME time ago Mr. Brander Matthews made the original suggestion in the *North American Review* that books should be written for the benefit of the reader. The suggestion is not on the face of it paradoxical, but it will be rank heresy to those who blame the public for not bowing down before the sacrosanctity of the "serious" author. He admits that "a book ought to be rich with the full flavour of the author's personality;" primarily it ought to express him; but secondarily—and this is Mr. Brander Matthews' point—"it is for the sole benefit of the reader."

I think we may go a little further than Mr. Matthews, and find a second reason why certain authors fail to find favour with the general reader. In the case which Mr. Matthews seemed to be considering there are authors who have every qualification for writing except that they cannot write. Secondly, there are authors who, in the ordinary literary sense of the term, can write, who have gathered knowledge and formed seriously-grounded opinions about life, who are nevertheless so out of touch with the broad, common interests of men that they invariably fail to make a strong emotional or imaginative appeal.

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

Every reader is acquainted with the tiresome writer who has a great deal to say but labours infinitely in the saying of it. In a crude, energetic, excessively eulogised novel published in America a few years ago—*Queed*—we were introduced to an economist engaged upon a work so learned that he knew there were only three persons in America capable of understanding it. There is, doubtless, something to be said for an appreciative audience of three; but it is safe to assert that even the exact sciences might be made more widely intelligible. I am, however, thinking primarily of those studies which have some claim to rank as literary studies. It is through literature that the historian, the biographer, the sociologist, and the philosopher must make their contributions to knowledge. Yet how much research and how much acute thinking are wasted because the student has not the means of making his subject alive for others, has not the reconstructive imagination by means of which truth is communicated! It is because he cannot write.

But this being able to write is not a matter of putting words and clauses together with correctness and elegance. That much the mere scholar generally understands, and it is because he thinks it sufficient that he fails. What is wanted is a quality of mind which is too often excluded from the specialist by his habit of thought. "A few years of journalism," said Mr. W. B. Yeats on one occasion, "is an invaluable discipline for the man of letters." No one is more fully alive to the defects of journalism than Mr. Yeats—its frequent looseness, prejudice, obviousness, and dissipation of interest. But, in spite of that, he saw

SPECIALISM IN LITERATURE

that the good journalist's faculty of addressing himself directly to the subject in hand, of stating it clearly and in its essentials without waste of words, of so escaping his own particular mould of thought that he may be easily intelligible to a variety of minds, required a discipline and a broadening invaluable to the man who really has something to say. The specialist is inclined to lack the broad outlook of one who is interested in many things ; he acquires a jargon of his own ; his mind runs in the narrow channel to which that jargon corresponds ; the language he uses becomes stilted and dead. There is no tonic in the truths he tries to proclaim, no relevance to the rest of knowledge. In other words, what he has to say may be scientifically valuable, but he fails to convey it to any but his fellow-specialists.

Mr. Brander Matthews points out that the great students are those who have combined the Teutonic thoroughness with the French comprehensiveness and lucidity. Gibbon and Mommsen are the great examples to which he points. England surely has been very rich in writers thorough and lucid, but we may observe that they follow rather the eighteenth-century tradition, with its intelligible common sense, than the romantic or transcendental tradition, with its mysticism and obscurity. Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, the most lucid of philosophers, are scarcely easier to follow than John Stuart Mill, Huxley, and Leslie Stephen. But it is hardly necessary to enter a *caveat* against supposing that lucidity of expression is precisely proportional to clearness of thought. The philosophy of Kant did not admit of the simple language of Hume, and T. H. Green and Mr. Bradley

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

are not to be blamed if they are more difficult to understand than Sir Leslie Stephen.

The second aspect of the question is more important, especially at a time when we are constantly reminded that the public is indifferent to the finest creative literature now produced. The fault may be with the public, and it may also be with the authors. It is worth remembering that this is a time when special forms of expression are being made to do work which once belonged to other forms. Fiction, for example, is being made to carry the load of philosophic psychology, of poetry, of the economic, moral, or political treatise. Drama is often used as a vehicle for truths which were once left to the pulpit, the political platform, or the lecture hall. Both of them, in the case of the extreme realists, are being used as the store-room or the dissecting chamber of the experimental scientist. Supposing that an author's facts are supremely important, his discernment most acute, his ideas significant, still, before we condemn the public unheard, we are compelled to ask of him : Have you given to this material a form which it will accept ? Have you addressed the public in a language which has a wide human appeal ? Are you, in fact, a master of that higher technique which implies an understanding, not only of the fine essences of truth, but the broad, common facts of human nature ? It is just because they are not masters of this higher technique that many exponents of so-called " intellectual fiction " and " intellectual drama " are doomed to failure.

I am well aware that such arguments as this must be qualified. For I have not forgotten that what are

SPECIALISM IN LITERATURE

now the commonplaces of culture were once the unintelligible obscurities of a sage. Much that we now apprehend at a glance, all that makes our cultural birthright, was only acquired by slow and arduous processes, in which the pioneers were laughed to scorn. The original mind sees things in a new light, and his language is to us strange and unfamiliar, and we do not learn it till our eyes and ears have become accustomed. And there are others who do not stand conspicuously in the main stream of mental progress, who, nevertheless, remote and perhaps secluded as they are, have a vision rarefied, subtle, strange not only in their own times, but for all times. Those men have their own communication to make to those anxious to add to the fineness of their perception, or merely perhaps to the oddness of experience. If some sting of truth reaches the mind through writing obscure to the general, through language which may be barbarous in form, an author has justified himself; and it would be idle to follow Mr. Brander Matthews in his quotation from the ever-pleasing Lord Chesterfield: "Speak the language of the company you are in; speak it purely and unloaded with any other." For, after all, is it not open to the author to choose his company? If his receptions are ill-attended, that may not reflect ill on those who accept the invitation. Not everyone will read the poems of Mr. Doughty; Mr. Doughty has made it hard for them; but if they do, they are repaid. Not everyone will tolerate the finesse of Mr. Henry James; but among those who can understand him, assuredly Mr. James is in very good company.

VI

SPECIALISM IN PHILOSOPHY AND JUSTICE

IN the play called *Justice*, Mr. Galsworthy attacked the professional mechanism of English law in much the same way as the late William James attacked professional philosophy. These two kinds of specialism, or departmentalism, may therefore conveniently be treated together ; for I may leave Mr. Galsworthy and William James to conduct the attack, contenting myself with the task of linking up their forces. Both Professor James and Mr. Galsworthy appealed against the machine—the one against the machine of thought which is divorced from common perception, the other against the machine of the law which has no contact with the needs of persons. “We,” said William James, meaning the Pragmatists, or the Humanists, “turn to the great unpeopled and unstayed wilderness of truth as we feel it to be constituted, with as good a conscience as rationalists are moved by when they turn from our wilderness into their neater and cleaner intellectual abodes.” In *Justice* the young advocate who appears for the defence is not so much pleading for the client under the law, as arraigning the present legal system, setting up a new conception of law based upon common sense, human insight, and a morality finer than legalism.

“Gentlemen,” he says, “men like the defendant are destroyed daily under our laws for want of that human insight which sees them as they are, patients, and not criminals. . . . Justice is a machine that, when someone has once given it the starting push, rolls on of itself. Is this young man to be ground to pieces under this machine for an act which at the worst was one of weakness?”

This attempt to get back to something that *satisfies* the human mind, the human idea of good, is to be seen equally in these two thinkers who belong to different countries and different traditions. The word “satisfactory” continually occurs in Professor James’ writings. “Humanism,” he says, “conceiving the more ‘true’ as the more ‘satisfactory,’ has sincerely to renounce rectilinear arguments and ancient ideals of rigour and finality.” He wishes to break with that view of philosophy which says “the anatomy of the world is logical, and its logic is that of a university professor.” He is one of those who, having been a lifelong student of philosophy and psychology, has the energy to know that, however theoretically perfect may be the logical system evolved by thought, that system will not be sufficient to prevent a man from saying, “After all, am I sure of it?” The only things of which we are sure are those things which we directly experience. We know the appearance of a tree, because we see it; we know the emotion of pity or love, because we have felt it; we know that what we call tigers exist in India, because acquaintances have seen them, and direct experience has taught us that their evidence

is satisfactory, and if we went to India their testimony could be found true by the evidence of our own senses. "What becomes our warrant for calling anything reality? The only reply is—the faith of the present critic or inquirer. At every moment of his life he finds himself subject to a belief in *some* realities, even though his realities of this year should prove to be his illusions of the next." "*The most we can claim is, that what we say about cognition may be counted as true as what we say about anything else.*" Nothing is true for him unless it has reference to the world which we know, which we accept on faith, by the practical evidence of our senses, or, it might be added, our desires, our aspirations, our intuitions. Nothing is ruled out so long as it can be pinned down at any moment to what is real, to what is individual. "Demonstration in the last resort" is to the senses.

Contemned though they may be by some thinkers, these sensations are the mother-earth, the anchorage, the stable rock, the first and last limits, the *terminus a quo* and the *terminus ad quem* of the mind. To find such sensational *termini* should be our aim with all higher thought. They end discussion, they destroy the false conceit of knowledge, and without them we are all at sea with each other's meaning. If two men act alike on a percept, they believe themselves to feel alike about it; if not, they may suspect they know it in differing ways. We can never be sure we understand each other till we are able to bring the matter to this test. This is why metaphysical discussions are so much like fighting with the air; they have no practical issue of a sensational kind.

PHILOSOPHY AND JUSTICE

Truth, then, for the Pragmatists is that which has "practical consequences." A belief is held to be true when it is "found to work." Transcendent ideas have no validity except as ideas unless they are found to have a "cash value" in practical life, that is to say, unless they refer to, and are operative in, the world of immediate experience. "Reality is an accumulation of our own intellectual inventions, and the struggle for 'truth' in our progressive dealings with it is always a struggle to work in new nouns and adjectives while altering as little as possible the old." You may talk of Absolutes as much as you like, you may contemplate the fundamental categories of the mind, you may dwell upon the *a priori* conceptions to which all our experiences must conform, but the fact remains, says Professor James, turning his back on all transcendental idealism, "the concrete truth *for us* will always be that way of thinking in which our various experiences most profitably combine."

The true is the opposite of whatever is instable, of whatever is practically disappointing, of whatever is useless, of whatever is lying and unreliable, of whatever is unverifiable and unsupported, of whatever is inconsistent and contradictory, of whatever is artificial and eccentric, of whatever is unreal in the sense of being of no practical account. Here are pragmatic reasons with a vengeance why we should turn to truth—truth saves us from a world of that complexion. What wonder that its very name awakens loyal feeling! In particular what wonder that all little provisional fools' paradises of belief should appear contemptible in comparison with its bare pursuit!

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

When Absolutists reject humanism because they feel it to be untrue, that means that the whole habit of their mental needs is wedded already to a different view of reality, in comparison with which the humanistic world seems but the whim of a few irresponsible youths. Their own subjective apperceiving mass is what speaks here in the name of the eternal natures and bids them reject our humanism—as they apprehend it. Just so with us humanists, when we condemn all noble, clean-cut, fixed, eternal, rational, temple-like systems of philosophy.

I am not here seeking to examine closely, still less to criticise, Professor James' pragmatic doctrines. What I am concerned to show is that we have in him a trained philosopher adopting towards the theory of knowledge a point of view strangely similar to that which Mr. Galsworthy takes up towards the social ethics of modern England. Is it not Mr. Galsworthy's function to "condemn all noble, clean-cut, fixed, eternal, rational, temple-like systems" of morality and etiquette? Professor James' rationalist antagonists are exactly like the administrators of law and order criticised by Sweedle in the play: "They've forgot what human nature's like." Just as your Hegelian wishes for nothing but the perfection of knowledge, and leaves you in an inconceivable, unknowable Absolute, so, according to Falder, who has been in prison, "Nobody wishes you any harm, but they down you all the same." In precisely the same way as Professor James pleads for a view of truth which rests on the unfailing vividness of finite experience, so Mr. Galsworthy pleads for a justice which shall be applicable, not to an infinite number

of imaginary cases, but to the individual, to the person whom we might chance to know, and meet, and work with—to the necessitous human being. He pleads for a law which shall be elastic, not rigid ; dealing with men, not cases ; for which mercy shall come to be a part of the idea of justice. That which is good enough for human beings in their dealings one with another ought not to be too good for the law.

Intercourse with concrete reality is Professor James' requirement for the truth of an idea ; intercourse with human beings is Mr. Galsworthy's requirement as the basis of social morality and of law. That does not of course mean that the legislator must be acquainted with all those for whom he legislates any more than that we can directly experience the facts of history which we claim to know. But every rule—in knowledge, in morality, in law—must be referable to this test of intercourse. Let your judgment of human beings be such as you would award to those who are sufficiently human to be among your friends. Let it be directed solely towards the well-being of the individual so far as that is consistent with the well-being of society. Again and again Mr. Galsworthy has shown us how stereotyped views, abstractions of the human mind, settle down upon classes and individuals and warp their judgments and their conduct. In *Fraternity* he showed how the idea of class differences becomes an obsession in the human mind, obliterating the truer idea of human community, of those common qualities in character which are not skin-deep, like class, but fundamental. In *Strife* he showed how the idea

of the rights of an employer, of the rights of a workman, is an abstraction hiding from master and workman the human bond which human intercourse would have revealed. In *Justice*, again, he showed how that lowest of all existing codes, the legal code, erects a "temple-like" abstraction of the law to which all individuals, however different they may be, however various their requirements, are made to conform.

We may notice that in the cases both of the philosopher and the dramatist there is a return to what I may call a rudimentary common sense. Professor James' views come as a reaction in the course of the long evolution of ideas. If on the one side we had not had thinker after thinker who emphasised the necessity of approaching reality as a relation of the conscious mind, and on the other side sceptics who asserted that there is nothing knowable but the continuum of disconnected sensations which present themselves—a blind array of atoms—there would be no meaning in a thesis like that of Professor James, which refutes the follies of the two extremes, and stands upon a ground which is very nearly a denial of the possibility of philosophy. In like manner Mr. Galsworthy's ethics are only valuable as a chain in the progress of morality and institutions. Primitive society conceived punishment as an antidote to the horrors of unchecked violence. Mediæval law devised fearful penalties for the forger, because forgery was a fearful menace to the stability of a commerce not yet backed by a high commercial morality. But now we have reached the time when we are menaced by the machinery set up by our ancestors. The law works

with a violence and a brutality which were invented in, and proper to, an age of violence and brutality ; and we are confronted with the daily spectacle of judges compelled to administer an antiquated and ferocious law, which awards to the criminal the double penalty of chastisement and shame. The old barbarism clings to the machine and works havoc. And because it is old, and because we are accustomed to it, we tolerate it. We do not put it to the test, which must be a personal test : How does it work in the case of this individual and of that ? Is the application of these rules “ satisfactory ” when they are made to operate on the human beings for whom they were devised ? Has this code any social “ cash value ” when it is brought to bear on the lawyer’s clerk who forged a cheque to save a woman ?

I have not considered Professor James’ merits as a dialectician, or Mr. Galsworthy’s as a dramatist. I have attempted to hint at that quality in them which is called “ humanism,” humanism in thought, humanism in ethics—the quality which makes men seek to judge ideas, institutions and things by what they are worth to human beings for their most pressing, their most vital needs. It is evident that this same “ humanism ” is beginning to manifest itself in politics, religion and even literary criticism. Clearly it tends at all times to set up individual conviction against authority, freedom against discipline. It has as its virtue the quality of being opposed to red tape, professionalism, departmentalism, pedantry, officiousness, intolerance, lethargy, and the tyranny of custom ; it has its dangers in that, resting

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

as it does in the last resort on the personal and the concrete, it tends in ill-balanced minds to neglect the value of ancient and dear illusions, and to degenerate into chaos and caprice. Chaos, however, is not so much to be feared as those "little provisional fools' paradises of belief" exposed so brilliantly by William James.

PART THREE

LITERATURE AND MEN

I

BERNARD SHAW

It is doubtful if any person in England exercises so many-sided and so considerable an influence as that of Mr. Bernard Shaw. It is not that his books are read by very many thousands of readers ; that his plays have long runs or can compete in popularity with those of Mr. Barrie or the Gaiety Theatre ; that his lectures and speeches are reported so fully as those of an ordinary Cabinet Minister ; that his letters to the newspapers are as numerous as those of Mr. Algernon Ashton or Dr. Clifford in his prime. He seldom demonstrates his power by passing Acts of Parliament or organising garden parties. He figures less often in the Social and Personal columns than Sir H. Beerbohm Tree. He is not so well known in the law courts as Mr. Horatio Bottomley. Yet there is no other man in England who is so conspicuous in so many spheres of activity, and wherever he appears he is always *facile princeps* in the public eye. Everyone who has any knowledge of him is compelled to think about him, and those who have no direct knowledge of him—so insidious is his influence—are to be found constantly thinking in terms of Bernard Shaw. The active, talking, persuading, book-writing, lecturing, propagandist population of England has been bitten by him ; it re-writes and

popularises him ; it even talks his jargon when it is criticising him. It began by regarding him as a brilliant and witty writer whom no one could take seriously ; it now regards him as a serious, and indeed responsible, thinker whose wit is a matter of harmless inspiration, and often a tactical advantage.

Mr. Shaw, in fact, has thrust himself upon English public life. Wherever anything is doing or being talked about he is in the thick of it. Whenever he rises to speak, he is supreme. He sweeps away all the false issues in a few sentences ; he attacks the very heart of the problem under discussion, and makes the most practical proposals. He can cover a hostile argument with ridicule, and drive it out of the field with good-tempered laughter. But his method is not only that of raillery. He is remorselessly logical. He can pursue the logical sequence of his case, and set it forth with a fusillade of perfectly relevant and illuminating instances and analogies. He never loses his thread like Mr. Chesterton ; he never wanders off into vague rhetoric like Mr. Wells. He chases his enemies and his subject until he has subdued the first and set forth the second so that it shines with crystal clearness. There is no man in England who can state a case, on the platform or in the Press, with such perfect lucidity, such logical order, with such brightness and lightness, or with such force as Mr. Bernard Shaw. He is the greatest debater in England, the greatest pamphleteer, the most observable personality in public life.

That is not all. As an organiser there is no one who has more driving power. He can set himself to

committee work, and keep every member of a committee active, himself included. He can, when necessary, pester responsible persons till they are goaded into action. Whilst his attention is always fixed on the central object, he has an eye for the most trifling details.

He is a first-rate business man. He knows as much about the trade of publishing as any publisher. He refuses to employ a literary agent, and personally transacts the business of placing his work—and sometimes that of his friends—in the literary and dramatic market all over the world.

Also he is a man personally benevolent. No one was ever less sentimental or romantic, but he is charitably disposed to everyone whom he does not regard as a fool.

If we examine the records of Mr. Shaw's life we shall see that it has been spent somewhere mid-way between the lives of the man-of-action and the man-of-letters. He has been primarily and essentially a critic of the current ideas about existing facts, the ideas which are pre-supposed in the typical and habitual activities of our modern world. He has been, almost invariably, a destructive critic—a critic of that rare kind which is able to win attention because he himself is so active in this Vandal work of his, because he can make his critical attack in so many different ways, because there seem to be a greater vital force and spirit in his pulling down of gods than ever existed in the gods themselves. Socrates, one would suppose, was not more insistent and unexpected in his gadfly attacks upon the

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

Athenian sophists than is Mr. Shaw in his raids upon the Pharisees of sophisticated London. His biography, when it is written, will be a very fascinating and a very large book, and Mr. Shaw himself thinks that it will be identical with the history of his time. There is already in existence a book which claims to be an authorised "Critical Biography;" and, needless to say, it was written by an American—Dr. Archibald Henderson—who stepped in with superb confidence and compelled Mr. Shaw to criticise, overhaul, and contribute to his daring enterprise. "You can force my hand to some extent," said Mr. Shaw, "for any story that you start will pursue me to all eternity."

This valiant American describes with gusto the active, talking, debating, propagating, protesting life that Mr. Shaw has lived. It has not been a "domestic" life; not even a specially "literary" life. We feel it has been a life in which there has been little privacy or intimacy, that it has seldom been wholly shut off from the market-place and the theatre; that if he is a man entirely destitute of "company manners," this is because he has lived always "in company." He was, of course, born in Ireland, not very far from Dublin. His parents were Protestants belonging to that middle class which is hampered by social pretensions and insufficient worldly means. He was taught at Protestant schools, where he was expected to believe that "Roman Catholics are socially inferior persons, who will go to hell when they die, and leave Heaven in the exclusive possession of ladies and gentlemen." At the age of

fifteen he went into a land office and helped to collect rents, without realising, it is to be presumed, that he was contributing to an iniquitous system. He studied pictures in the Irish National Gallery, became interested in music through his mother and her friends, and made his first appearance in print when moved to protest against the evangelistic services of Sankey and Moody. At the age of twenty he turned his back upon Ireland, and started a literary career in London. In the first nine years of "consistent literary drudgery" he succeeded in earning six pounds.

To put it frankly, Mr. Shaw was not born to succeed as "a mere man of letters," and assuredly not as a writer of romances. His own statement that he "exhausted romanticism before he was ten years old" is historically inaccurate. He started a literary career early, but at twenty-nine he was still a romantic young man who had written reams of romantic literature, and had signally failed. He was right to abandon romance; it had never inspired him, and it was entirely natural and human that he should ever after disown and abuse this treacherous mistress. It is characteristic that what really did inspire him and set him moving upon the course ever after to be his own was an event unconnected with those personal, intimate issues of experience which usually feed the flame of imaginative art. It was a debating speech by Henry George which aroused the reforming ardour thenceforward essential and characteristic in Mr. Shaw, a speech which sent him to Karl Marx, and made him a "man with some business in the world."

Henry George sent him to Karl Marx, and Karl Marx sent him to that group of clever people among whom were Graham Wallas, Hubert Bland, Sidney Olivier, and—of main importance—Sidney Webb.

“Quite the cleverest thing I ever did in my life,” Mr. Shaw is reported to have said to his American interviewer, “was to force my friendship on Webb, to extort his, and keep it.” Mr. Sidney Webb was then, as now, the constructive encyclopædist, the man who, wherever he went, “knew more than anybody present.” “The truth of the matter is that Webb and I are very useful to each other. We are in perfect contrast, each supplying the deficiency in the other. . . . As I am an incorrigible mountebank, and Webb is one of the simplest of geniuses, I have always been in the centre of the stage, whilst Webb has been prompting me, invisible, from the side.” It was this singular union more than anything else which gave direction and motive force to the propaganda carried on by the Fabian Society for a quarter of a century, whilst to Mr. Shaw personally it gave the consistency of thought and definiteness of aim which underlie all his later work. We cannot, of course, neglect the intellectual influence of Ibsen and Nietzsche, Wagner and Samuel Butler, the individualists and aristocrats who corrected the mob-sentiment of old-fashioned socialism; but these and similar influences matured in him through his Fabianism.

Bernard Shaw, of the Fabian Society, ceased to be a private citizen. He became a man of “affairs,” destined, thenceforward, to live in the publicity of debating-halls, among those ideas which reformers

and politicians have actually socialised, removing them from the privacy of human experience and turning them into public property—like parks, open spaces, and wash-houses. I do not mean that he treated this public property as other, and more conventionally-minded, men habitually treat it. Mr. Shaw walks down the Strand as if it were his private bridle-path. He walks across an Insurance Bill or a National Theatre scheme or a policy for giving self-government to Englishmen as a man who might be treading the weeds in his own garden. But the intellectual stage-properties were all prepared for him and presented ready-made in those times when he went night after night to lecture in the city and suburbs of London. He had, indeed, the social cosmopolitanism which made him dissociate himself from small literary coteries and gain a practical knowledge of publicly-minded men. But one cannot fail to see that his long experience of lecturing, debating, setting up arguments, and parrying verbal attacks—which made him the best debater in England, and turned him, as Dr. Henderson has suggested, from a doctrinaire into a “practical opportunist”—served not only to endow him with his consistency as a thinker and his excellence in expounding ideas, but also confirmed him in his defects as a humanist. His continual intercourse with the innumerable fixed ideas of societies and committees, his debater’s habit of attacking whatever fixed idea he encounters, have had the effect of organising his own mind along the lines of such fixed ideas, theses, positions and oppositions as could be defended or countered by his

boundless resource in argument, wit, and raillery ; and it followed that his interpretation of life was likely to resolve itself into the debater's generalisations, the partialities and half-truths which ignore what is individual, personal, intimate, and finest—for the finest things in life are those which cannot be generalised, which are individual and unique, which admit of being stated but not argued. It follows also that his strength is in attack and in destructive criticism. The only important positive ideas for which he stands are the Supermannish idea of the duty of every man to be himself to the utmost, and a generous democratic idea of freedom, in accordance with which every self-respecting man and woman should be given the opportunity to work out his or her own destiny fully, unhampered by the tyrannies of caste, prestige, sentimental traditions, false codes, and effete moral obligations.

But these ideas are of very considerable magnitude. They are capable of almost infinite extension and application to life. And it should be observed that, though Mr. Shaw thinks mainly about obvious "public questions"—politics, the professions, the institution of marriage, patriotism, public oratory, public health, etc., he has nothing in common with the unimaginative public man who merely criticises proposals and policies. He is always interested in the state of mind which produces proposals and policies. When he pleads for the abolition of the Dramatic Censorship before a Royal Commission, he gives us not only the most effective practical exposure of the Censorship that has ever been written, but

also a far-reaching philosophical analysis of liberty as freedom to express and propagate ideas. "My reputation has been gained by my persistent struggle to force the public to reconsider its morals," he says in the *Rejected Statement*, the presentation of which to the Royal Commission affords one of those delightful true stories that only a Shaw can make so damaging. "I write plays with the deliberate object of converting the nation to my opinion in these matters." That he has to a large extent already converted the intellectuals—whether by his plays or by other means—is beyond question. Many of the most powerful writers of the last ten years have concentrated their efforts on exposing the tyranny of the established idea and the established moral code. Such diverse writers as Mr. Wells, Mr. Galsworthy, Mr. Granville Barker, Mr. Cunninghame-Graham, Mr. Belloc, and Mr. Chesterton have written books the motives of which have been satire, divine anger, *sæva indignatio*, directed against the established moral codes or intellectual habits of the time. Mr. Shaw, who originally followed the obscure Samuel Butler, showed the way for the others. His method was, and is, to combine argument with the more telling weapon of ridicule. In his Preface to *Blanco Posnet* he exposes and ridicules the Dramatic Censorship, just as in *Getting Married* he exposes and ridicules the popular conception of happy domestic life, and in like manner in *The Doctor's Dilemma* the superstition that the faculty of medicine is infallible.

The picture of concerted professional fraud given us in *The Doctor's Dilemma* is not too exaggerated

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

for the purposes of a debating argument ; but in his long essay on the subject he gives a far more reasonable statement of the case. He does not treat the doctor as a murderer, or a pickpocket, or a human vulture, or even a cold-blooded cynic ; he explains what is likely to happen to the ordinary, moderately decent, normal man, without any special moral or intellectual equipment, who becomes a doctor. " As to the honour and conscience of doctors, they have as much as any other class of men, no more and no less. And what other men," he adds characteristically, " dare pretend to be impartial where they have a strong pecuniary interest on one side ? " He analyses the psychology of the practitioner and the specialist. He shows how much guesswork there must be where even the most distinguished differ ; in what manner we are all handed over, bound, to the tender mercies of the men who are often poor, overworked, unscientific, and, if they are specialists, prejudiced by exclusive study of one disease. What he says about the surgeon and the specialist is nearer to the truth than what he says about the general practitioner. Long experience of all sorts of illnesses is more valuable for the curing of simple diseases than much so-called " scientific knowledge ; " and, as it happens, the life of the general practitioner who comes into sympathetic contact with so many men and women of different types is one which does promote certain healthy cynicisms and human decencies singularly lacking in the specialist on the one side and the routine-driven hospital nurse on the other. But there we have the individual

equation. Mr. Shaw is good at considering general cases ; he is never, in his writing, much concerned about individuals.

The essay which preceded *Getting Married* is stronger in its attack than in its reconstructive proposals ; and the essay is better than the play, because Mr. Shaw can present arguments more effectively than persons, and arguments are more suited to essays than to plays. It is interesting to find him confessing that "young women come to me and ask me whether they ought to consent to marry the man they have decided to live with." Mr. Shaw, of course, urges them "on no account to compromise themselves without the security of an authentic wedding-ring." He should not have been surprised. He, if anyone, should have known that if you attack an existing morality, the public will inevitably think you are advocating the corresponding "immorality" as popularly understood ; and one suspects that Mr. Shaw has, from this natural misunderstanding, more to answer for than he himself dreams of. When he calls himself "an immoralist," he means that he is the true moralist ; that he is going to substitute for a decayed, outworn, conventional, and stupid morality, a morality based upon a rational human principle—a morality that will make society better and more tolerable. In this particular essay he asks us to get rid of the idea that the family, *as at present constituted*, is the highest form of human co-partnership. "The people who talk and write as if the highest attainable state is that of a family stewing in love continuously from the cradle to the grave can

hardly have given five minutes' serious consideration to so outrageous a proposition."

Home life as we understand it is no more natural to us than a cage is natural to a cockatoo. Its grave danger to the nation lies in its narrow views, its unnaturally sustained and spitefully jealous concupiscences, its petty tyrannies, its false social pretences, its endless grudges and squabbles, its sacrifice of the boy's future by setting him to earn money to help the family when he should be in training for his adult life (remember the boy Dickens and the blacking factory), and of the girl's chances by making her a slave to sick or selfish parents, its unnatural packing into little brick boxes of little parcels of humanity of ill-assorted ages, with the old scolding or beating the young for behaving like young people, and the young hating and thwarting the old for behaving like old people, and all the other ills, mentionable and unmentionable, that arise from excessive segregation. It sets these evils up as benefits and blessings representing the highest attainable degree of honour and virtue, whilst any criticism of or revolt against them is savagely persecuted as the extremity of vice.

But when Mr. Shaw begins to reconstruct, and thinks that the whole matter can be solved by such simple—and so far as they go, excellent—economic expedients as making women economically independent, and legitimising children, he ceases to be persuasive. There comes a point when brilliant cleverness and sheer logic *from necessity* miss the truth. It is precisely the cut-and-dried Fabian side of Mr. Shaw which blinds him to facts of a certain sort—the fact, for instance, that for certain human needs

no ingenious, or *invented*, rational remedy is possible ; that in certain departments of life where the great instincts are concerned the accumulated conscious and subconscious experience of thousands of years of mankind have produced a kind of instinctive knowledge which logic cannot tamper with ; which is bound up with human nature and is near to a thousand subtle truths never yet brought within the scope of scientific knowledge ; which it is dangerous to attack by a brutal frontal assault, as if the issue were a single and simple debating issue ; which is defied only under just such penalties as Mr. Shaw himself alludes to.

It is already evident why Mr. Shaw is far better as lecturer, debater, pamphleteer, and writer of critical essays than as writer of either romances or plays. He is primarily a social reformer, like Henry George and Karl Marx, though he brings more wit, cleverness, driving power, and intellectual agility to bear upon his subjects. He is interested in public morality and "affairs," in generalities rather than individuals, in ideas about life rather than in life at first hand. He sees through the intellect rather than through the perceptions. He is concerned to prove and to teach rather than to *show*. He has made very few *characters* in his plays, for the simple reason that he handicaps his persons by treating them as *ideas* rather than as *persons*. This is to say, that as an artist he is never disinterested ; he is more concerned with the case which his puppets are set up to prove than with a situation for its own sake. In *Cæsar and Cleopatra* he did for once allow a subject to exist for

its own sake. He had no axe to grind, primarily, on behalf of society and its morals. It is not perhaps the cleverest of his plays, but it is the play which is most a play; and if it is not a great play, that is because Mr. Shaw is not a great dramatist—he has not allowed himself to be a great imaginative artist—he turned his back upon imaginative art at the age of twenty-nine.

In the cleverest of his plays there is, indeed, always one real person, and that person is none other than himself. In *Man and Superman*, in *Arms and the Man*, and in *John Bull's Other Island*, the hero is in each case nothing more nor less than a new impersonation of Bernard Shaw. (In *John Bull's Other Island* I take Larry Doyle as the hero.) The hero is a man who on every possible occasion either gets up and argues with extraordinary fluency and good sense as if he were a very brilliant young man in a debate, or else is forced into the sort of action which that brilliant debater would have advocated. Broadbent, in *John Bull's Other Island*, is not a person at all; he is a brilliantly conceived caricature of English stupidity; he is a general idea, not an individual. Even Keegan, who has been extolled as a romantic and unusual figure among the Shavian *dramatis personæ*, is a chorus rather than a character, and essentially Shavian in that his ideals are vegetarian, and that his language is couched in such terms as—

How will you drag our acres from the ferret's grip of Matthew Haffigan? How will you persuade Cornelius Doyle to forego the pride of being a small landowner? How will Barney Doran's millrace agree with your motor-

boats ? . . . Perhaps I had better vote for an efficient devil that knows his own mind and his own business than for a foolish patriot who has no mind and no business.

That is not the way in which priests, madmen, or idealists talk in Ireland. It is the way they talk at the Fabian Society.

The present writer is fully aware of the great work which Mr. Shaw has done. He yields to no one in his admiration for the strength of character and the spirited eagerness which have made him so effective in his onslaught upon pernicious illusions, in making people look beyond the formula and refuse to be blinded by social taboos. But it is just because his influence is so great and in many respects beneficial that we ought to be on our guard against a man who may not always mesmerise us to our advantage. And it is in the matter of the drama and the fine arts in general that Mr. Shaw is proving a dangerous Messiah. He has done much to cleanse the Augean stables of the English theatre. He has discredited though he has not destroyed the artificial "drawing-room play ;" he has poured ridicule upon the so-called "well-made play" which Scribe, Sardou, and their school could concoct for the delight of Frenchmen ; he has exposed the insignificance of the accidents and catastrophes, and the coming down of the curtain "on a hero slain or married." He has compelled sensible people to look to the theatre for something more than sentiment, romance, ingenuity ; for something relevant to the larger issues of life. That he has done ; and it is doubtful if any English-speaking and English-writing man now alive, except-

ing Mr. Shaw, could have done it with any thoroughness.

But having freed us from these old tyrannies of the stage, he has not rested there. He has imposed new tyrannies of his own which are sanctioned either by his own extraordinary influence or by that swing of the Time-Spirit of which he is the visible pendulum. He is very persuasive, and puts his case so well that he is able to blind us to false issues. He states his case in the Preface which he wrote to *Three Plays by Brieux*. Brieux is for him the greatest French dramatist since Molière; and more important because whilst Molière was content to indict human nature, Brieux devotes his energy to an indictment of society. "His fisticuffs are not aimed heavenward: they fall on human noses for the good of human souls."

When he sees human nature in conflict with a political abuse he does not blame human nature, knowing that such blame is the favourite trick of those who wish to perpetuate the abuse without being able to defend it. He does not even blame the abuse: he exposes it, and then leaves human nature to tackle it with its eyes open. . . .

You do not go away from a Brieux play with the feeling that the affair is finished or the problem solved for you by the dramatist. . . . You come away with a very disquieting sense that you are involved in the affair, and must find the way out of it for yourself and everybody else if civilisation is to be tolerable to your sense of honour.

All this is unmistakable. Mr. Shaw regards the theatre primarily and essentially as a substitute for the pulpit, as a convenient lecture-hall for the pro-

paganda of Shavian socialism. He takes it for granted that there is to be a social "problem;" that "fisticuffs" are to be aimed at somebody's nose as they were in those delightful games of play in which he indulged as a young and earnest Fabian; that the audience is to come away tuned up to social endeavour just as people come away from Revival meetings tuned up to the tasks of spiritual salvation.

This is well enough. Upon two conditions, I agree that there would be no objection to Mr. Shaw or any other dramatist using the theatre as a means of reforming men; these conditions being, firstly, that he is able to do it—which I doubt; and secondly, that he should not insist that this use of the theatre is the only proper and legitimate use.

Mr. Shaw has not yet been able to use the theatre in this way, and still less, Brioux. Brioux's influence in France is mainly due to the fact that he is a brilliant and eloquent lecturer. Mr. Shaw's influence in England is due to his essays, speeches, conversations, personal vehemence, and ubiquity. People go to see his plays because they are very witty; they understand them and think they are convinced by them only when they have read and digested his far more convincing Prefaces. The reason why it is impossible to be profoundly interested in his plays is because he is not profoundly interested in them himself. He evidently wrote them without being excited about his persons, their experiences, or the emotions which the situation drew from them; he was excited about his case, about the moral or social truth which his puppets could be made to illustrate. There is

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

much ingenious arrangement, much plausible argument, and abundant wit. What really does delight us is the often irrelevant wit of the conversation, and this because Mr. Shaw himself delights in irrelevant wit ; it is only when he is writing wittily and irrelevantly that he is disinterested, that he is doing something for its own sake, that he is writing in the only way in which an artist can write effectively. But in so far as he is aiming at something other than a significant presentation of life—and he generally is—he is attempting to “indict” society, to show up abuses, to expose political and social sores ; he is ceasing to be interested in his subject, his persons, his play ; he is forcing human nature out of itself ; he is distorting it ; he is making it unreal ; he is creating monsters—and no dramatist, no artist of any kind, can deal effectively with monsters. When he writes a play, Mr. Shaw attempts to do two completely different things at one and the same time—to present life, and to deduce an arguable and preconceived conclusion about life. If he has not completely failed, that is because he has not completely lived up to his theories.

It is not Mr. Shaw's fault that so many of the cleverest younger writers of the time allow themselves to be led away by his example. But that they are so led away—not only in drama, but in the kindred art of fiction—is a fact so important that it requires statement. Mr. Shaw is entitled to his own opinion that “ what we want as the basis of our plays and novels is not romance, but a really scientific natural history ; ” he is quite right, if he feels it to

be his own particular function, to spend his whole force in "indicting" society. But how terrible a loss in human interest and vitality if all our creative artists are to occupy themselves in this process of "indictment"—indictment being at all times the antithesis of fair criticism and presentment. I would venture to suggest that human life, roughly speaking, may be divided into two great parts, one of which is completely tabooed by Mr. Shaw. These two parts or aspects of life may be named and envisaged in a hundred different ways. Aristotle called them the "practical" and the "theoretic." The Roman Church called them the "temporal" and the "spiritual." The social philosophers called them the "State" and the "Individual." They may be called "Science" and "Art," "Politics" and "Poetry," "Public" and "Private," "Social" and "Personal," "Public Work" (Shaw) and "The Will of God," "Philanthropy" and "Friendship," "Justice" and "Mercy," "Humanitarian" and "Human." Each second term in these categories is cut clean out of modern life by Mr. Shaw. When he says that "Ibsen was to the last fascinating and full of a strange moving beauty," he says it as if he were reproaching Ibsen. His whole influence is thrown on to the side of an austere common sense which destroys emotion because it may become fanaticism, which laughs at sentiment because it may be perverted into nonsense, which is as Puritanically cruel to the insidious blandishments of romance as Plato was cruel to the poets.

Is it fanciful to imagine that it is with the Irishman as I have always fancied it was with the Greek

philosopher, that by reason of his own knowledge of the dangerous burning fever of poetry, from his own susceptibility to its enchantments, he decided to crown the poets with garlands and banish them to another city ? That, indeed, is an idle fancy. Mr. Shaw exists to prove that there are Irishmen who do not suffer from the intoxication of beauty, who are not susceptible to the windy ardours of romance. Nevertheless Mr. Shaw, too, has his romance. He learnt it in the eager, fighting days when he held up the standard of Fabianism before the blinking eyes of suburban audiences ; when he learnt to detest the silly ways of silly people whose silliness was feebly glorified under the names of morality, religion, sentiment, and patriotism ; whose qualities he soon found himself exposing in the manner habitual to the trained debater. But this was no ordinary debater. There were conviction, sincerity, and even romantic—God save the word !—*romantic* zeal behind this fire of argument, laughter, repartee. Life had become for him, as he said to Dr. Henderson, “ a sort of splendid torch, which I have got hold of for the moment.” It became his business “ to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.”

II

H. G. WELLS

MR. SHAW has said that his biography will be the history of his time. In like manner we might say of Mr. Wells that his life has represented the English life of his time. The former has touched this English life at a thousand points, but he has touched it from the outside. The latter has been an integral part of it, a part which has sprung into consciousness of itself, so that he has written from within outwards. Inevitably in writing about the England of his time he has found himself writing about that England of which he himself is symbolic. Mr. Shaw is amazingly clever in generalising about England, in reducing England to formulæ, in expressing the ideas which her life and society have stirred in his logical mind. But Mr. Wells has felt this national life within himself; he has known it by conscious and subconscious experience, this experience being with him a kind of instinct developing into self-knowledge, and so into a more objective and philosophical perception. You can tell from Mr. Shaw's light, debonair, and laughing manner, just as you might guess from his rather hard and unemotional writing, that experience of living has laid no heavy toll upon his temperament. How different that nervous and slightly self-conscious manner of Mr. Wells, that exterior geniality which

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

never wholly possesses the man, a cover, as it were, to those inner springs of consciousness to which he has evidently referred the world !

It was strange when these two men, presenting so marked a contrast, confronted each other at the Fabian Society—that association of well-informed, constructive, slightly academic Socialists to which both at the time belonged. It was evident that Bernard Shaw, supported by Sidney Webb, standing for a perfectly clear-cut policy and program, should win the day against a man whose appeal was essentially to something not clear-cut, not defined, but to instinct and psychology. I have been told that Mr. Wells was never able to put forward a coherent program, to state an intelligible case—but all that I know for certain is that it was not intelligible to the Fabians. It is probable enough that his program, as a program, was defective, for whilst it is perfectly easy to define a simple, definite, not widely inclusive policy of action, it is far harder to define that side of the life of a nation which belongs to temperament and instinct. This was what Mr. Wells had in mind ; but the social reformers to whom he addressed himself preferred a definite scheme touching the surface of life to an indefinite scheme which aimed at the centre. So Mr. Wells ceased to be a Fabian, and became a Tory-Socialist.

I suggest that Mr. Wells' life and activity may be taken as symbolical of the life of his time. He has told his own story again and again in his novels ; it is his own story that he has been telling when he unfolds his ideas about the society in which we live.

He, more than any other considerable living writer, seems to have been born to realise within the microcosm of his own experience the social evolution which most of us see in the maerocosm of the nation—an evolution which has been *observed* by Mr. Bennett with equal clearness, but in a less personal and subjective way, with more detachment. All of us know from the study of history in what way England has changed in the last hundred years—how scientific thought suddenly gained a new importance when it was applied to industry—how the shell of feudalism survived its vitality when the great factory towns began to dominate the country—how all the classes were shuffled and left unsettled—how the cities spread out in disorderly suburbs and slums, without plan or direction—how men and women became factory workers and office workers without knowing why, most of them scantily educated, housed as the competing jerry-builders thought fit, and flung into the maelstrom of competitive labour. All this we knew in a certain sense, but it was Mr. Wells more than anyone else who made us aware of this national life by presenting it in the only possible effective way, the imaginative way. It may almost be said that he gave it to us as an impressionistic account of his own life. He had lived in all this ; the social system, or lack of system, had expressed itself in him ; and finally he became conscious of all those elements about him and in him which had left their deep impression. Most of us have had an experience in some way similar, though not many of us have been so intimately acquainted with so many classes, so many

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

varieties of people, or have felt our experiences so acutely. He was singular in that he found his way to an expression of those effects which the national life had had upon *him*—that is to say, upon a man who had been brought up in a lower middle-class family in the Victorian era, who had watched the London suburbs creeping outwards, who had lived among shop-assistants, who had studied science in laboratories, who had aspired to something more fruitful for the spirit. He did not become aware of these significances all at once. The first eager desire to express himself and create took the form of those early romantic stories—*The Invisible Man*, *The Descent of the Martians*, *The Time Machine*, etc.—stories in which his knowledge of science and Jules Verne were not yet allied to a philosophic enthusiasm for human beings in society. Then he began to be conscious of the great problems of society, and generalised about them in his romantic, ingenious, philosophically imaginative way in such books as *Anticipations*, *A Modern Utopia*, etc., until he began to realise that that personal method which he had adopted in *Kipps* was the best method of expressing the consciousness now awake in him of his own life, of his relations with the people he had met and the country he had lived in, and of the vague, restless desires—desires cast in the mould of this material world, yet half mystical in their nature—which had first made him percipient, then critical and dissatisfied, then critical and irritable, then critical and religious, and afterwards—it remains to be seen.

It was in *Tono-Bungay* that Mr. Wells achieved an

unquestionable success. When he wrote that book it seemed that all the experiences of which hitherto he had been only partially conscious became clear to him; that all the clever but unrelated literary efforts which he had hitherto made found here their clue and connecting link, their inspired synthesis. Long before this he had written astonishing, ingenious, philosophic, shrewd, suggestive books, but he had achieved no success on this scale. Here he seemed to have brought together all the threads of his many intellectual energies, and woven them into a single fabric fit for wear-and-tear and adornment. At the first he had written romances such as Jules Verne would have been glad to write; he had gone on to project new worlds constructed after analysis of the present, or in anticipation of the future, or ideally from the ideal; he had written comic stories and weird stories, and one or two true stories; and he had turned to economics and political science with reforming zeal. But here we have it all again, not in parts, but as a comprehensive whole, in a novel which asks us to consider every class in the social ladder in modern England, which questions the whole organisation of our society, which raises central questions about birth, marriage, religion, death, and survival, and presents the whole as a personal and human affair.

Mr. Wells set himself to this task in his own queer, plodding, English way. To the niceties of style and form he paid little attention. He tells the story as best he can, in his own slangy, cumbrous, Latin-English, but idiomatic way—there is little selection

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

or self-suppression, but he makes his points. He draws from a copious store. Considered as social satire, it is an exposure of the silliness and futility of our system of competitive capitalism superimposed on feudalism. Or you may take it as a book of adventure, and find our hero and his erratic uncle plunging into orgies of hazardous exploits and achievements. Or you may take it as a novel of love, and languish with the hero in a misdirected amour, and burn with him in a glorious, futile, and tragic affection. Or you may take it as a novel of England, of the many currents of English life joining in one vast stream on which the barque of the narrator floats. “ ‘ This,’ it came to me, ‘ is England. This is what I wanted to give in my book. This ! ’ ” And this, the vision which comes to Mr. Wells through a kind of instinct about the life he has experienced and sought to convey—the vague dream that haunts and baffles him—the desired, intangible, dimly-felt, but unknown thing—is offered as a kind of mystical solution to the insoluble problem of an imperfect world.

The title—it is typical of Mr. Wells—suggests at once the farcical element in the whole thing. Tono-Bungay—a quack medicine, “ slightly injurious rubbish ” sold at “ one-and-three-halfpence and two-and-nine a bottle, including the Government stamp.” We can only approach Tono-Bungay, which is modern and representative of our whole industrial system, by way of something prior to it—the old social order which exists only as a tradition, which is maintained as a vast, stupid, demoralising pretence, undermined

by Tono-Bungayism. The old order, in Mr. Wells' language, is called the Bladesover System, Bladesover being the house where "I," George Ponderevo, the housekeeper's son—one of the many incarnations of the author himself—was born, brought up, and acquired his first impressions of life.

The great house, the church, the village, and the labourers, and the servants in their stations and degrees seemed to me, I say, to be a closed and complete social system. About us were other villages and great estates, and from house to house, interlacing, correlated, the gentry, the fine Olympians, came and went. The country towns seemed mere collections of shops, marketing-places for the tenantry, centres for such education as they needed, as entirely dependent on the gentry as the village and scarcely less directly so. I thought this was the order of the whole world.

"All this fine appearance was already sapped." George himself, as a boy, had already begun to "question the final rightness of the gentlefolks," declaring his rebellion by "resolving to marry a viscount's daughter" and blacking the eye of her half-brother. He is transported to the house of Nicodemus Frapp, baker, of Chatham, where he again rebels, this time against the threat of being burned for ever in Hell. Thence he is taken to the house of his uncle Ponderevo, chemist, of Wimblesbury, a small town dominated, like Bladesover, by the landed gentry tradition. And he finds in this uncle, whose name is soon to become a household word throughout the country, a veritable embodiment of the new spirit which is invading the Blade-

sover system and altering England. Mr. Ponderevo is restless and discontented. He does not like Wimblehurst. "One rubs along. But there's no development—no growth. They just come along here and buy pills when they want 'em—and a horse-ball or such. They've got to be ill before there's a prescription. That sort they are. You can't get 'em to launch out, you can't get 'em to take up anything new."

Mr. Ponderevo, being bankrupt, moves to London, and in the course of time George, now a student of science, follows him. New vistas of life open up in the midst of this vast, overgrown, "purposeless," "dingy" city. Nobody since Dickens has given us the impression of London in all its multitudinous, dismal-gay activities as Mr. Wells gives it us. But it is no longer the London of Dickens. It is a "great, stupid giantess," a "city of Bladesover . . . parasitically occupied, insidiously replaced by alien, unsympathetic, and irresponsible elements." It was a chaotic mass of houses built for the middle-class Victorian families. And even while these houses were being run up :

Means of transit were developing to carry the moderately prosperous middle-class families out of London ; education and factory employment were whittling away at the supply of rough hard-working, obedient girls who would stand the subterranean drudgery of these places ; new classes of hard-up middle-class people such as my uncle, employees of various types, were coming into existence, for whom no homes were provided. None of these classes have ideas of what they ought to be, or fit in any

legitimate way into the Bladesover theory that dominates our minds. It was nobody's concern to see them housed under civilised conditions, and the beautiful laws of supply and demand had free play.

It was such a London, such an England, which offered itself invitingly to the predatory ambitions of Mr. Ponderevo, so that out of a simple concoction of drugs and water he was able to capture the money of hundreds of thousands who fondly believed that Tono-Bungay would give them new vigour and zest in life. Mr. Wells describes to us the sudden rise and development of Mr. Ponderevo, to whose fortunes those of George are linked ; he tells us how he grows in importance, how he moves into houses larger and larger to suit his new place in the social scale, how vast a position he comes to hold in the financial world of London, in the philanthropic world, and, of course, in the social world.

It is whilst he is interesting us in George and his associates that Mr. Wells makes us aware also of the higher unit of society and the whole strange fraud of modern life, the pretence that there has been no change when conditions have radically changed and are still changing. The theory of the old order broods over the new, chaotic, haphazard world which flings people up and down, sets their whole life—birth, marriage, possessions, happiness—at the mercy of mere chance. In the love interest which is an important part of the story he presents the modern treatment of marriage and sex as another disastrous example of muddling and disorder.

But he does not dwell long or didactically on each

of these problems. They arise naturally and inevitably, as a part of human life, in the course of his story of adventure and love. He does not pretend to solve the perplexing questions. The hero feels that he is "like a man floundering in a universe of soap-suds, up and down, east and west." "I can't stand it. I must get my foot on something solid or—I don't know what." Behind it all, in its chaos and ugliness, he does not lose the sense of something other and better, a vague but insistent ideal cherished by the spirit. "There is something links things for me, a sunset or so, a mood or so, the high air, something there was in Marion's form and colour, something I find and lose in Mantegna's pictures, something in the lines of these boats I make."

There, evidently enough, is something that the artist, the poet even, wants. It is the mystical need, the desideratum, expressed in terms of this world's goods—"Marion's form and colour," "Mantegna's pictures," the lines of a boat. If there is any solution here, let it be noted that it is essentially an individual, a personal solution, the artist's solution of the world-problem in terms of what is personally significant to individuals. But when applied to men and women in the mass, how thin and watery this ideal becomes, how unsubstantial and shadowy, how unsuited to the collective needs of society, which are practical and material. Every man in his public, social capacity must necessarily express his ideals in a material and practical form; the mystical side can only find expression in the private life, in the personal way which is the way of art and individual

intercourse. But when Mr. Wells became dimly aware of the personal equation in life and the personal ideal, he, who had already dedicated himself to the treatment of social problems and men in the mass, attempted, by mystical contradiction, to identify the private and the public, the ideal with the material, the free with the bound. To make my meaning clearer, I will recall again the incident at the Fabian Society. It is just as if Mr. Wells had gone to that mixed gathering of austere and flippant socialists, and had said, "We want something to link things for us; we must remember the things that men cherish most of all, a sunset or so, a mood or so, the high air. When we are settling the women's question, we must not forget that Marion cares more about her form and colour than about her vote; and if we are nationalising the great masters, let us remember that there is something we may find and lose in a single Mantegna more important to us than all the galleries in the world. The derelict 'Victory,' with her romantic lines, means as much to the nation as the biggest Dreadnought in the world."

And we can imagine Mr. Shaw getting up to question the novelist. "Will Mr. Wells explain to us how the State is going to preserve Marion's colour? Does he propose to arrange sunset effects on Primrose Hill? Will he describe the apparatus by which he intends to capture and bottle the high air, and distribute it for public consumption? And where are we to look for the something to be found in Mantegna's pictures when he has been so unfortunate as to lose it?"

Mr. Wells, naturally enough, broke with the Fabian

Society ; and at the same time, discovering the inadequacy of his remedy, broke with the whole social order, resigned himself for a time to sheer irritation, and took his revenge upon the world in *The New Machiavelli*. He devoted his brilliant powers to satirising the whole public life of Great Britain, in the same breath lampooning the public persons with whom he had been personally associated, and defending himself against certain personal charges which had been brought against him.

It was an effective book. It occasioned not a little gossip, excitement, scandal, and even heart-burning. Though the author announced that the persons in the novel were composite characters, not to be taken as likenesses of real persons, and though no doubt there were scenes and conversations which he had invented and incidents which he had transposed, nevertheless in many essentials the story was photographic. Mr. Wells himself was never, like his hero Remington, either at Cambridge or in Parliament, but he came under the same educational, social, and political influences which determined Remington's character and career. Remington's friends, who are exposed in all the intimacy of private life to the public gaze, were once, under other names, the friends of Mr. Wells. No one who has any acquaintance with public personages in London can fail to identify those apostles of social organisation, Mr. Bailey and his wife Altiora. Equally transparent are the young Liberals, Edward and Willie Crampton. If the novelist has caricatured these persons he has seen to it that he has never distorted them out of

recognition. The realism with which he describes these and a score of popularly "esteemed" public men is applied also to their womenkind; Isabel is not spared; nor is Margaret, Remington's wife.

Here, then, we have what is at the same time Remington's Apologia for his errors, and his revenge upon the society which decided to discredit him. He presents himself as an "unarmed, discredited man," whose power with the pen cannot be checked; a man "half out of life already" because of the "red blaze that came out of my unguarded nature, and closed my career for me;" a man who "cries out of his heart to the unseen fellowship about him," and to those who "have heard already some crude inaccurate version of our story and why I did not take office, and have formed your partial judgment on me." Remington's reply to the man who urges him to hush up the scandal gives a colour of personal disinterestedness to the story.

"It's our duty to smash now openly in the sight of everyone. I've got that as clear and plain—as prison white-wash. I am convinced that we have got to be public to the uttermost now—I mean it—until every corner of our world knows this story, knows it fully, adds it to the Parnell story and the Ashton Dean story and the Carmel story and the Witterslea story, and all the other stories that have kicked man after man out of English public life, the men with active imaginations, the men of strong initiative. To think this tottering, old-woman-ridden Empire should dare to waste a man on such a score!"

But Mr. Wells intends something more than to explain the state of mind which led a distinguished

politician and moralist, a married, middle-aged man, to victimise—that is the “worldly” way of looking at it—a beautiful young girl who had fallen in love with his genius. Here we have the life-story and character of Remington portrayed at full length—Remington an individual product of our social environment—Remington in relation to the vast national processes which have been changing England from the “muddle” of the Victorians to the muddle of to-day—a Remington clever enough to see our representative institutions stripped of their hollowness and their cant ; quick to pierce through the shell of Liberalism, not perhaps quite to the kernel of it, but to the insincere part of it ; quick to see a profound psychological meaning in the Suffragette movement, and to distinguish between the outer bearing of public men and the individuality behind it—the “hinterland.” The whole was a brilliant analysis of England in macrocosm and microcosm welded into the life-story of Remington. And his hero is not like one of Mrs. Humphry Ward’s puppets, set up to be a great politician. Remington as a thinker is almost a great man ; he is a profound analyst of society on its human side ; he is a gifted critic of public institutions ; even his absurd perversity in trying to invent a constructive, motherhood-endowing Toryism is the perversity of a versatile and clever man whose action is precipitated by bitterness or pique.

But the extraordinary thing about *The New Machiavelli* is, that this envisaging of England in her social, political, and intellectual life, this acutely and almost diabolically observed crowd of *real* persons,

this minute psychology, this exact history, this elaborate philosophy—all are subservient to the purpose of explaining how it was that Remington was driven into the net of sex, and Isabel was enabled to “darn hissocks.” *Parturiunt montes*. Is it thus that Remington will make himself immortal in literature, the twentieth-century Benvenuto Cellini, swaggering, in a self-conscious, twentieth-century way, through the tale of his glorious peccadilloes? Or is it to be a Jonathan Wild, memorable as the hero of a hundred magnificent felonies with which a Fielding or a Wells could glorify a sturdy vagabond? But Remington writes in bitterness. His pen is steeped in the gall of Swift. He feels rancour against *Altiora*, against the Cramptons, against all the “Pinky-Dinkies” who prescribe morals for a genius erratic in his desires.

The successive mental stages by which Remington emerges had been set forth before in other books. They are here brought together and surveyed in a comprehensive whole. He is anxious to strip off the disguises of human nature, and to expose, in each of the persons arrayed before us, the “self-behind-the-frontage.” “In the ostensible self who glowed under the approbation of *Altiora* Bailey, and was envied and discussed, praised and depreciated, in the House and in smoking-room groups, you really have as much of a man as usually figures in a novel or an obituary notice.” His ideal is the individual who lives and acts in the full light of that “self-behind-the-frontage”—the “hinterland,” as he calls him; and his literary method in this book is to expose the emptiness of the shop-window, to cast his satire upon the poor show.

The weakness of his attacks is that the ideal with which he would illuminate his background is shifty, uncertain, ill-realised ; being undetermined, the function that is allotted to the human ideal is actually left to chance, to accidental impulse rather than to conscious will—to human frailty rather than to human strength. Hence it is that he declares the rights of sex where its claims are weakest ; now applauds the conduct of Remington, now apologises for it ; now explains elaborately that his mere sensual side would assert itself, now that sex never appealed to him without an admixture of the ideal ; now cries out for discussion and public enlightenment on this subject, and now acknowledges that Remington, who had discussed it for years, acted on impulse, in the dark. How uncertain it all is, how mixed in its motives, how brilliantly bewildering in its conclusions—and yet how clever !

It was probably a passing phase in Mr. Wells' history, an unhappy phase for him, presumably, but inevitable. In the uneasy period of irritation and defiance he lost none of his skill in self-portraiture, in projecting himself upon the canvas of modern life. It was that vein of undefined Romanticism in him, according so ill with the life of "public affairs," that put him out of harmony with himself. Such an ideal as he had formed for himself could never by its nature completely satisfy any but the solitary recluse, and had little to give to man in his social capacity, still less to the man whom he depicted in *Marriage*, irritated, frustrated, drained of his higher energies by the irritating calls of society. Long

before, in *A Modern Utopia*, he had prescribed for his Samurai rulers a periodical course of solitude and meditation in the desert. In the book which, while I write, is the last of his books—*Marriage*—he comes back to the same idea. He depicts a hero full of scientific ardour and intellectual ambition who finds that in the social life there is nothing to satisfy his deepest needs, and that only in turning his back on the world of people and flying to commune with God, nature, and himself, in solitude, can he attain the mystical peace he longs for. The social world which becomes an obsession to Trafford, his hero, is made to swarm about him through the inevitable net of marriage—although it is marriage to a fascinating woman whom he still loves. At first he had sacrificed his scientific ideal to the domestic and material needs. He had abandoned research in order to make Marjorie rich and to surround her with luxury and smugness. The comfortable house, the artistic surroundings, the social pleasures, and the ennui of acquaintances reveal themselves to him as frustrations of the life which man in his more glorious capacity seemed destined to live. He sees the impulses under which men and women seek to escape “from the petty, weakly stimulating, competitive motives of low-grade and law-abiding prosperity.” Marriage is the social bond which has involved him in this. Marjorie herself has become the feminine embodiment of that urgent life of “getting on,” of just “doing,” which seeks to trammel, stifle, and kill the spirit and higher intelligence of man. Through marriage the earthy sociality of life had thrust itself

upon him, and was killing what was apprehensive, curious, spiritually and intelligently aspiring within him. He rebels. He flies to the wintry wilds of Labrador, and takes Marjorie with him.

There, in a merely fantastic but brilliantly described scene, amid the thrilling dangers of a wild solitude and a grim winter, they discover themselves. They come near to one another in moments of peril, deprivation, and self-sacrifice. He passionately asserts, she passionately agrees, that "we can't *do* things. We don't bring things off!" . . . "The real thing is to get knowledge and express it" . . . "This Being—using its eyes, listening, trying to comprehend it. Every good thing in man is that—looking and making pictures, listening and making songs, making philosophies and sciences, trying new powers, bridge and engine, spark and gun. At the bottom of my soul, *that*." He sees man without "eyes for those greater things, but we've got the promise—the intimation of eyes."

This is not, it is to be feared, a very satisfactory solution for the average man or woman who is suffering either from destiny unrealised or from the milder malady of nerves. The medical or the spiritual adviser who should prescribe a course of Labrador whenever we are physically or spiritually "run down" would be of little use to the majority of us. We see here the monkish side of Mr. Wells' temperament deliberately torturing the social and worldly side of him, the spirit suggesting to the flesh and the devil that they ought to be content with spiritual contemplation. The mystic has the final word in those

humorous-passionate conversations in which first and last things are discussed by the man and the woman in the wild—the man and woman, still comparatively young, about to return to a new life in civilisation. But what will they become when they return ? What will Marjorie do when the shops once again lie temptingly before her, and when her aunt Plessington's guests once more besiege her, and social life presents itself again in its garish variety ? Is this visit to the wild more decisive than marriage itself ? Will their brief vision of God, their intellectual and spiritual conversion, make them "live happily ever after ?" Mr. Wells, at least, should know that it will not ; he will surely be bound to write another novel to show the final stage of Marjorie and Trafford, the renewed conflict, within them and between them, of the world and the spirit. For it is a conflict without end, a conflict which Mr. Wells, as he goes on writing the history of his own most interesting self in relation to his own most interesting environment, must contrive to present to us in each new book that he writes.

III

ARNOLD BENNETT

MR. ARNOLD BENNETT has often been spoken of as if he were a sort of revised edition of Mr. Wells. In reality the contrast which these two writers present is far more remarkable than the resemblance. The important works of Mr. Wells came first in order of time, and Mr. Bennett would readily admit that he owes much to the other's imaginative pictures of a changing civilisation. He belongs also, like Mr. Wells, to the essentially English tradition of fiction. In spite of an admiration for French literature which has had a refreshing effect upon his style, he has written many of his novels as Fielding, Smollett, Dickens, and Thackeray wrote theirs—out of the abundance of his imagination, from an inordinate eagerness to reproduce human life in all its profusion, in its littleness and its greatness, a colossal whole out of which the reader rather than the artist makes the selection. In his longer books he has adopted the epic rather than the dramatic method of writing fiction. He will often indulge his fancy for insubordinate episodes, so long as they are in some way characteristic. He loves abundance of description—there is scarcely any novelist who is more precise in describing all the minutiae of a place or the physical traits of a person. This sort of profusion

is very English ; and Mr. Wells, too, is essentially English.

The two men were born at about the same time. They came from families which belonged, broadly speaking, to the same social class. They have both of them written with perfect frankness of the sort of people they have known intimately in their youth. And there, I think, the resemblance ends.

The contrast is far more striking. All the most important of Mr. Wells' books have been written about himself. Mr. Bennett has never written about himself excepting in an early book like *The Man from the North*, in certain inferior books of his middle period, and when he is deliberately writing his impressions of places, as in his book about America. It is always the personality of Mr. Wells with which Mr. Wells is most concerned, and the world as related to him. The personality of Mr. Bennett is kept in the background. He is an interested observer, and he gives what he has seen or believes that he has seen—he reports faithfully as one who might be held responsible for the actuality of his vision. Men and women, places and things, are all to him curious phenomena which it will be worth his while to note, to try to understand, to record in so far as they are significant.

Mr. Wells has an extraordinary intellectual capacity of interpreting his own impressions, and lighting upon truths by some romantic or instinctive process of his own. Mr. Bennett has a very much harder sense of fact. He understands romance, but he is not himself romantic. His interests are all in the understanding and interpreting of the significant

facts of life, and he cares very little for the pleasure of living outside that kind of living which is artistic perception. And yet he has so much practicality and common sense—the sense of fact which in his art stands him in such good stead—that he has even been prepared to sacrifice his art to the main practical necessities of life. At any rate, it is upon this hypothesis that we must explain some of the very poor books which he perpetrated before it became worth his while to protect his reputation—the only other possible explanation being that, as he writes at all times and in all moods, much of his work might be expected to be below his proper level.

But Mr. Bennett is not only extraordinarily versatile in his observations of people, places, books—anything whatsoever that he comes upon—but he has the faculty always of seeing objects as if he saw them for the first time; that is to say, he brings imaginative curiosity to bear upon them. He is not personally distressed, like Mr. Wells, about the evil fate of the world any more than he would be elated by its good fortune. But he is interested. He looks for character, and he finds it. He looks for situation, and he makes it. He can be content with a light comic situation, as in *Helen with the High Hand*, and the result is admirable. He can present with equal skill profoundly poignant situations, such as occur in *Clayhanger* and *Hilda Lessways*. He is aware of the fact that life is a spectacle; and that to make it interesting you must make it vivid, you must show it as something that is intense and passionate. And he is also aware of the fact that the feeling of inten-

sity and passion may be elicited from a sense of the monotonous, the trivial, and the vapid ; that tragic effect may be gained by the spectacle of men seeking an ideal which is beyond their powers, or grasping at an ideal which proves unworthy, or indifferent to an ideal which we see to be within their reach.

It may be taken as certain that, with or without the example of Mr. Wells, Mr. Bennett must inevitably have been affected by the sense of the changing conditions of modern life, and the passing of the generations from one set of habits to another. For it must be remembered that he was born and brought up in the Potteries in the middle and later Victorian periods ; that as a young man he left those provinces, and in course of time found himself engaged in the profession of literature at a safe distance from them. He wrote about all sorts of subjects—and in every sort of style—articles, didactic books, fantasies, novels—but as a good journalist he at length discovered that on one subject he was a specialist, that to his accounts of one part of the world he could supply “ local colour ”—that part of the world being, of course, the Five Towns of the Potteries. He made this region his own. He adopted it for literary purposes. And in writing *Anna of the Five Towns*, *Tales of the Five Towns*, *The Grim Smile of the Five Towns*, and his more famous later novels he naturally found himself describing the Potteries as they were when he was a young man, but as they no longer are to-day. What was more natural than that, as he passed from the last generation to the present, writing in the present about the remarkably different

past, he should become supremely impressed with the very fact of the transition—that fact of changing and growing old which dominates *The Old Wives' Tale*, and supplies him with his theme in the play of *Milestones*?

In *The Old Wives' Tale* he presents a series of pictures which make us realise that there are men and women about us who were brought up in a world so totally unlike ours that we regard it as purely historical. He has brought out this fact in a way that may cause misgivings even to those who are still considered young. He takes us back to the most vivid memories of our childhood. He recalls to us what England was like and what people were like in an age when electric trams were unknown, when bicycles were rare, when the retail trader was a person who could still call his soul his own. He has shown us people born in one world and growing old in another. He has presented to us the fantastic but true panorama of certain persons who were young and idealistic, who became middle-aged and practical, who are now old and acquiescent; of persons who were born mid-Victorians, who became later-Victorians, who to this day survive grotesquely among the moderns—and again young men and women of to-day who themselves will survive to a derelict old age among people as unlike us as we are unlike the heroes of Mrs. Ward Beecher Stowe. No one of us will attain a ripe old age without experiencing three different generations marked by three different sets of habits, sentiments, ideals. Mr. Bennett's subject is the tragi-comedy of growing old.

The author presented his people, and the places in which they lived, in all the minutiae of their and its existence. He combined the realistic modern method with the bitter, ironical, sententious method of Thackeray. There is nothing in the first half of this book which Thackeray would have done better, and Thackeray never illustrated a law of life remorselessly working itself out as Mr. Bennett has done. His mind and his perceptions are at work simultaneously. He is alternately humorous and grim, but is too philosophical, interested, and detached ever to be bitter. That was the world our fathers were born in—he shows it to us—that is what our fathers are among us to this day—and again we have the picture. “You cannot step twice into the same river,” said Heraclitus. “You cannot go back to the town you were born in,” Mr. Bennett means to say; and his book makes his meaning clear.

Two sisters, Constance and Sophia, are the girls, women, widows whom we see growing up from the 'fifties to the latter part of the first decade of the twentieth century. When we meet them first they are young girls—fifteen and sixteen—“rather like racehorses, quivering with delicate, sensitive, and luxuriant life; exquisite, enchanting proof of the circulation of the blood; innocent, artful, roguish, prim, gushing, ignorant, and miraculously wise”—at an age when “if one is frank, one must admit that one has nothing to learn: one has learnt simply everything in the previous six months.” These two young people are unconscious of “the miraculous age which is us.” They lived in the Potteries before the

Potteries had acquired that big black spot on the map which now dignifies and degrades their existence. They lived in and around the important draper's shop in "The Square," under the wing of their respected parents, the once active citizen, now paralytic, Mr. Baines, and Mrs. Baines, the ruler, the dictator of the household and of the morals of all its members.

In the first stage we see Constance and Sophia subject to this parental rule. They take castor oil when they are bidden. They do not leave the house without the sanction of Mrs. Baines. They must not, needless to say, realise the fact that marriageable young men are real facts. They must pay attention to the shop, preserving a proper distance from the assistants. They must be careful that Maggie, the servant, does not overhear familiar conversations. They must not go into the drawing-room except on Sunday afternoons. They must wait upon the paralytic father with proper punctilio. And they must be quiet and attentive when Mrs. Baines is directing their morals. Then Mr. Baines dies, because Sophia has been looking out of the window at a dashing commercial traveller; and Mr. Bennett soliloquises :

John Baines had belonged to the past, to the age when men really did think of their souls, when orators by phrases could move crowds to fury or to pity, when no one had learnt to hurry, when Demos was only turning in his sleep, when the sole beauty of life resided in its inflexible and slow dignity, when hell really had no bottom and a gilt-elapsed Bible really was the secret of England's

greatness. Mid-Victorian England lay on that mahogany bed. Ideals had passed away with John Baines. It is thus that ideals die ; not in the conventional pageantry of honoured death, but sorrily, ignobly, while one's head is turned.

But the generation of the Baineses does not give place easily ; it tries to shut its ears to the knocking at the door, insistently as it may knock in the whimsical, assertive personality of Sophia. The romantic commercial traveller whose fault it was that Mr. Baines died a premature, though, scientifically speaking, a belated death, is the symbol of the new influence which Mrs. Baines is too out-of-date to resist. Sophia runs away with the commercial traveller, makes him marry her, and is translated from "The Square" to Paris. Poor Sophia ! She is the victim of being half a generation ahead of her time, a suffragette before it was an honour to be a martyr to the cause. But in Constance the old influences are stronger. She persists like a piece of old furniture which survives the relic-hunters and the broker's men. She marries that trusted servant, Mr. Povey, who has such a head for inventing tickets and labels and sign-boards, who himself outdistances Mr. Baines as railway trains outdistance stage coaches, and as aeroplanes will outdistance motor-cars. The married couple naturally displace Mrs. Baines, and Constance notices her mother shortly after the honeymoon—"Poor dear !" she thought, "I'm afraid she's not what she was." "Incredible that her mother could have aged in less than six weeks ! Constance did not allow for the chemistry that had been going on in herself."

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

And so they go on, till Mr. Povey is "forty next birthday," though, dear innocent soul, he scarcely notices it as we notice it tragically in these days of quick living. And Constance buries her mother, and becomes engrossed in Cyril, her son, and scarcely observes how the atmosphere in the Potteries gets blacker and blacker, and the trains run nearer and more frequently, and the electric trams replace the horse trams, linking up the Five Towns of the "District." And Mr. Povey too gets buried, and Constance's son goes to London, and her hair grows white, and at last—at last Sophia comes back to live with her in the old house in the modern Potteries. And still those two old women are living there together.

I shall not dwell upon the career of Sophia—who has pursued her life in Paris very wisely, shrewdly, circumspectly, not to say commercially, thus showing how honest bourgeois ancestry can triumph over the flightiest of modern temperaments. Suffice it that she is now an aged widow, a contemporary of the Crimean veterans, living to this day in comfortable and old-maidish sobriety in the Potteries, hardly conscious of the fact that aeroplanes are an innovation. It is Mr. Bennett, not the Sophias, who makes us conscious of the strange, portentous progress of evolution ; of the lapse of time ; the changing mind of man ; the desperate love of what has been ; the inevitableness of what is to come, of what is to replace us, and put us, too, on the shelf among outworn things.

In *Clayhanger* and *Hilda Lessways*, the first two

books of a trilogy which, at the time when I write, is still unfinished, Mr. Bennett again presents the process of the generations, but he has given us a more intense dramatic interest, he has singled out a few persons for more significant characterisation ; he has focussed his picture better, concentrated the interest, and produced emotional tension. The reason why *Pickwick* retains its place as the first of Dickens' novels is that it is almost the only book he wrote which had a really satisfactory hero—an individual character. *Clayhanger* has two such persons—Edwin, and Darius his father, as well as a dozen or more of interesting subordinate characters. There are other things with which Mr. Bennett is concerned in this book beside the transition from youth to old age, from Victorian to Edwardian. But he does not let us forget this transition. “To Edwin, Darius was exactly the same father, and for Darius, Edwin was still aged sixteen. They both of them went on living on the assumption that the world had stood still in those seven years between 1873 and 1880. If they had been asked what had happened during those seven years, they would have answered, ‘Oh, nothing particular.’”

Ordinary, humdrum life, an integral part of the national life, enacting by slow, imperceptible changes the processes of the Time-Spirit, still occupies Mr. Bennett's attention. He has again traced for a score of years the lives of a group of people belonging to the risen, well-to-do tradesman class in the latter part of the Victorian era. With the successive cross-sections of life which he draws for us he again makes

us look backwards and forwards to the England of yesterday and the England of to-morrow: the England which has been revolutionising its conditions of life once or twice in every generation, and has been giving its persons different food for ideas, different standards to act upon, different habits to conform to or revolt against: people whose parents were nurtured in the sweated atmosphere of factories before the Factory Acts, and whose sons will be the people of 1913. He shows us a whole generation of persons who, living through these prodigious changes and being asked what has happened, reply, "Oh, nothing particular." But though the score of people in the Potteries with whom we are concerned are but individually selected from the swarm that is provincial England, they are none the less intensely individual. Darius Clayhanger, the hero's father, the man who has emerged from the pit, and by sheer obstinacy in work has made himself well off with his printing shop, stands out clear as life with all his idiosyncrasies. Hard, plain-spoken, without conscious ideals, satisfied with the *status quo* (since the Corn Laws were passed), unelastic, relentless, he is yet capable of bursting out emotionally in a manner that displeases his more guarded son. We have memorable persons in Big James, the foreman; Mr. Shushions, the aged Primitive Methodist; Aunt Clara, the lady whose business in life was tact; Mr. Orgreave, the architect; Janet Orgreave, his daughter; and others who come familiarly in and out.

All of these persons whom I have mentioned, com-

pletely different as one is from another, are none the less normal provincial characters. They have a natural place in the Five Towns; their ambition does not stretch out beyond the finite limits of Bursley unless it be to the mild ecstasies of conventional religion or the generous aspiration which accompanies song.

But the hero, Edwin Clayhanger, is something different. In the head of Edwin the boy "a flame burnt that was like an altar-fire." But would the atmosphere of the Potteries be damp enough to quench that flame? Or did that flame burn intensely enough to survive so that his spirit should rise out of the commerce, the routine, the unaspiring neighbourly atmosphere which is the dull *clay* of life? He longed to be an architect. He did not understand architecture, he was unaware of its finest possibilities, but something in him akin to the art-impulse made him long to be an architect. But his father stamped out that ambition. He entered his father's works, and, however rebellious at heart, was continually submissive to his overmastering will. But once, when the routine was settling down upon him, illumined only a little by vaguely directed reading, his soul was burst out of its environment by a passionate love which grew in a day; which seemed to win success; but was thwarted by the woman who, without a word, incomprehensibly, jilts him.

The years pass on—Mr. Bennett's transitions make us imagine forlorn, almost intolerable passages of years in which the human soul trudges stupidly and wearily towards death, discussing muffins and tea

whilst the Cosmos is plotting upheavals for the sole benefit of stupidity in the mass—and Edwin, suffering at his father's hands, triumphing over him in old age, is becoming an ordinary inhabitant of Bursley, working, resting, taking his ease. Sometimes the smouldering flame bursts out in him again, and he would perceive that he had been nothing, achieved nothing, that he had been a mere "spendthrift of time and years." "And there was he, Edwin, eating bacon and eggs opposite his sister in the humdrum dining-room at Bleakridge."

But the flame breaks out once more. Art had had no chance to claim him for its own, and Love had cheated him. But when he discovers Hilda, and Hilda's son, and Hilda's misery—Hilda, "with her passion for Victor Hugo, obliged by circumstances to polish a brass door-plate surreptitiously at night!"—with her, love, passion, pity, intensity of living come back to him.

It is interesting to turn from *Clayhanger* to the story of *Hilda Lessways*. This story has not quite the distinctive note which Mr. Bennett struck in the two preceding novels. What we miss is, first of all, the "local colour" which is the author's speciality, most of the scenes being laid in Brighton or London; and second, that detached manner which enabled Mr. Bennett to present his persons as if he were himself indifferent to their fate, with the result that they stand or fall entirely on their own merits. Here we feel that he is a partisan. He has taken up Hilda's case. He is evidently prepared to champion her against all the world. Hence the very femininity of

the heroine which he has so cleverly created, to some extent colours the book itself, as if by a kind of sympathy between author and heroine. The fervid woman has sometimes communicated too much of her fervour to the very language of the author.

But in other respects the book shows an advance in Mr. Bennett's art. For the first time in his life he has resisted the temptation to overwhelm us with the wealth of invention which his fertile mind is busy upon. He has pruned away the unessential details. He has cut away the delightful but irrelevant details which even in *The Old Wives' Tale* and in *Clayhanger* threatened to shatter the perspective; and has concentrated on the matter in hand with enormous advantage to the dramatic sharpness and distinctness of his story.

He has made a further gain in intensity by using the story of *Clayhanger* as a background to the present story. The technical difficulty in all creative literature is a difficulty of language and symbols—the difficulty of so speaking to the reader that he may see moods, moments, situations, concurrences of life and forces of passion in the fine, dry, intense light in which the author has seen them. That is the infinite difficulty of all literature—to find a language and to create an atmosphere which may become familiar to the reader without becoming commonplace. How much do we gain in the reading of Shakespeare by the fact that from the sheer poetry of the thing we have been compelled to read him a score of times! How fully the Greek dramatists understood that to be instantly appreciated they

must deal with stories every detail of which was stored with friendly associations for the audience !

Mr. Bennett elicits something of this effect of the marvellous from the familiar by putting the life-story of Hilda Lessways on a foreground behind which lies the already familiar story of Edwin Clayhanger. We remember Clayhanger living in the printing shop in the Potteries ; his uncouthness, his shyness, his pertinacity ; his desire to be an architect and to live the imaginative life, thwarted by his grim old father ; and the manner in which Hilda dawned upon him, entered into his experience in a brief rapture of passion, and disappeared, leaving Clayhanger to grope again with the commonplaces. And in this new story we see the life of the girl, the woman ; she, too, groping among the commonplaces, with her heart set upon a wider experience, till a moment comes when her story coincides with and is complementary to that of Clayhanger. The speeches which we heard her make in the earlier story are heard again here, with greater comprehension ; the apparently trifling words which fell from the lips of Clayhanger, scarcely heeded, are heard again now, and heard as they sounded to Hilda, grasping after a purpose and a fulfilment of herself.

Mr. Bennett has endeavoured to examine the mind and heart of this woman from the inside. Whether the machinery of the emotions, the will, and the intellect really do work out just like this is a matter harder for a man to decide than for a woman ; but to me Mr. Bennett's account seems plausible. What is mainly important is that Hilda, whether she is

psychologically true to life or not, is, at any rate, a conceivable person. She is presented as one more example of the spirit too large for its habitation. Cooped up with her mother in a little house in the Five Towns, she was in trouble not the less acute because "the trouble was that she wanted she knew not what." Hilda, maturing, steadfast, idealistic, with a desperate readiness to live through the inferior things of life if she could not now grasp the best, with a vitality which enables her to emerge again and again from tragedy that for most people would be final, is a contrast to her rather futile, fussy, merely experienced mother. Hilda flings herself into the work of a provincial newspaper office with the ardour of her idealism. Here was something she had set her mind on, and the practical quest was a religious passion, tragic in its way because the real result of the work was so paltry and sordid.

What was she ? Nothing but a clerk at a commencing salary of fifteen shillings per week ! Ah ! but she was a priestess ! She had a vocation which was unsoiled by the economic excuse. She was a pioneer. No young woman had ever done what she was doing. She was the only girl in the Five Towns who knew shorthand.

And Mr. Bennett succeeds in interesting us in the ambitious, speculative Cannon mainly by reason of the pathetically inadequate objects on which he lavishes the passion of his energies and his ideals—on a newspaper, a corrupt thing—on a boarding-house, a centre of triviality. And Miss Gailey, whose heart is set on her hot-water bottle and her cup of tea, and the easing of her rheumatism, interests us

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

profoundly, because it is such death-in-life which may prove tragically destructive to the ascendant nature of a Hilda.

Mr. Bennett is not afraid of the drab side of life. But he never shows peevishness on the one side nor bloodless romanticism on the other. He sees this drab side, and he sees the passion of life—the aspiring human always trying to be more than it is, or can be, in some desperate, foolish way. This is the tragedy and the hopefulness of tragedy which Mr. Bennett has grasped. To possess a keen faculty of observation by which to present life exactly and realistically, and at the same time to re-imagine these facts so that the vividness, the intensity, the pitiful passion of life are what we mainly remember—to combine these two qualities as Mr. Bennett combines them is to hold a unique position in contemporary literature.

IV

GILBERT CHESTERTON

It has often been pointed out that the intellectuals—the people whose business it is to formulate opinions in Parliament, Press, and Pulpit—are not really expressing public opinion ; they are only expressing the opinion of the intellectuals. Perhaps it would be nearer the mark to say that every civilised or semi-civilised human being may be divided into two persons, the one an individual who chooses, walks, eats, feels, and imagines in a private and personal way ; the other a sort of official person who registers formal opinions when called upon to do so. The latter corresponds to the “intellectual,” and is the dominant element in the souls of the ruling classes ; whilst the former—the instinctive, the spontaneous, the common-sense element—dominates the man in the street.

It would not be far wrong to describe Mr. Chesterton's philosophy as a sort of sublimated public opinion *minus* the opinion of the intellectuals. To get at what I mean I must for the moment ask the reader to think of Mr. Chesterton as an abstraction. Let him conceive an Englishman, unlike any existing Englishman, who has never heard of Darwin or Spencer ; who has never been impregnated with the theory of induction or analytical psychology ; an

Englishman who has never read or heard of Macaulay, Froude, Carlyle, Ruskin, Bagehot, Mill, Seeley, or Mr. Frederic Harrison ; who has read none of the poets since Milton ; who has never been asked to consider the Reform Bill or the Education Bill, the Oxford Movement or the Æsthetic Movement, Realism or Impressionism, Non-Resistance or the Will to Power, Mr. Bernard Shaw or Mr. Aylmer Maude, the Primrose League or the Labour Party, Mr. Yeats or even Mr. O'Finnigan. Let us imagine that this agreeable abstraction is in the habit of moving about among other abstractions like himself ; that he knows a horse when he sees it (even if he cannot ride it) ; that he is accustomed to hospitable inn-parlours where you may discuss any philosophy so long as it is not a system ; that he has a chivalrous admiration for women ; that he likes sunshine and adores the moon ; that he believes in God, the respectability of wives, ballad poetry, good fellowship, and good wine.

And now, having stripped Mr. Chesterton so that he is no longer even an attenuated ghost of himself, let us re-clothe him and present him decent and as he is. We must imagine this abstracted personage, ignorant and therefore unbiassed, suddenly introduced to all the learned jargon of the day. He still retains his simple views about things out of date, and is called upon to pronounce views upon entirely new matters—aristocracy and democracy, religion and scepticism, art and morality, Tolstoy and Nietzsche. A welter of odd ideas and delirious fanaticisms is suddenly sprung upon his simple consciousness. He finds all the intellectual circles in England working

themselves into a fury about ideas, factitious ideas, which positively did not exist for him when he was a happy abstraction. Naturally, in his brief visit to the unabstracted world he has not time to study in detail all the philosophies which have been invented for the purpose of debate. But he goes round from circle to circle, listens to this argument and to that, notices the effect which the various philosophies have upon the characters of their exponents, and himself enters into the fun of debate as if he had never been an abstraction at all. He accepts the terminology which he finds ready made, but of course uses it in his own way—he is obviously unable to take anything for granted like the people who have always been intellectuals. He continually comes across queer verbal usages, and feels bound to declare that what we call free-thinking is not what we call free ; that what we call certainties are also what we call uncertain ; that aristocrats are unaristocratic ; that doubters are dogmatists ; and that tradition is an “extension of the franchise.” And then the world, having never been out of its own generation, having never been anything so shocking as an abstraction, dismisses Mr. Chesterton with the smiling remark that he is, after all, a brilliant writer of paradoxes.

Let us for a moment put aside our own intellectual prejudices, our preconceptions, and follow Mr. Chesterton along his path of common sense. He himself, in his book on *Orthodoxy*, throws over the intellectuals. It is not that he refutes them—that would be a denial of his own method ; nor that he has completely studied them—that would be a denial of his

own character ; but he does show us what havoc their methods may work upon the mind, what an overthrow of our workaday notions, our most vivid and keen impressions. If all the things that we seem to know the best, the emotions most natural to men—"fighting peoples or proud mothers, or first love or fear upon the sea"—if all these things stand for nothing, if they are not to be thought about by our philosophers, what have we got left ? The cosmos ? "The cosmos is about the smallest hole that a man can hide his head in." He finds that the great popular thinkers—and it is right that he, a potent popular writer, should concern himself with these rather than with the systematic philosophers who observe conventions incomprehensible to the common mind—are each and all of them prone to follow exclusively some strange bent of thought, leading by pure reason to one of those awful conclusions which "tend to make a man lose his wits : " Tolstoy, for instance, reaching an unthinkable doctrine of self-sacrifice, Nietzsche an equally unthinkable doctrine of egoism, Ibsen, Haeckel, Mr. Shaw, Mr. McCabe—that never-to-be-forgotten Mr. McCabe—each of them by sheer force of logic betrayed into insanity.

Just as I am affected by the maniac, so I am affected by most modern thinkers. That unmistakable mood or note that I hear from Hanwell, I hear also from half the chairs of science and seats of learning to-day ; and most of the mad doctors are mad doctors in more senses than one. They all have exactly that combination we have noted ; the combination of one expansive and exhaustive reason with a contracted common sense. They are

universal only in the sense that they take one thin explanation and carry it very far. But a pattern can stretch for ever and still be a small pattern. They see a chess-board white on black, and if the universe is paved with it, it is still white on black. Like the lunatic, they cannot alter their standpoint, they cannot make a mental effort and suddenly see it black on white.

Madness, he says, is "reason used without root, reason in the void." "Madness may be defined as using mental activity so as to reach mental helplessness." For he notes how some of the rationalists, in doubting everything, have cast doubt even on the validity of thought. The complete sceptic says, "I have no right to think for myself. I have no right to think at all." The intellect has destroyed, but has not constructed; there is no proposition which is not doubted, no ideal which is not an object of attack; there is no rebel who has a sure faith in his own revolt, no fanatic except the fanatic about nothing. Where are the common things—the things we used to know and care about—the self-contradictory things if you like, but the realities—the things which make men kill their enemies, go gladly to the stake, or shut themselves in a hermitage?

All these are things which, Mr. Chesterton thinks, the intellectual is willing to throw overboard at the bidding of intellect. But he would rather throw over intellectualism. He prefers to abide by the "test of the imagination," the "test of fairyland." "The only words that ever satisfied me as describing Nature are the terms used in the fairy books, 'charm,' 'spell,' 'enchantment.' They express the arbitrariness

ness of the fact and its mystery. A tree grows fruit because it is a *magic* tree. Water runs down-hill because it is bewitched." The so-called "laws of nature" are not one whit less mysterious because of their uniformity. And again: "It is supposed that if a thing goes on repeating itself it is probably dead; a piece of clock-work." Mr. Chesterton supposes exactly the opposite. "Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, 'Do it again;' and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony. But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, 'Do it again' to the sun, and every evening, 'Do it again' to the moon. . . . Repetition may go on for millions of years, by mere choice, and at any instant it may stop."

Is not this, someone will say, only the *Religio Medici* over again? Is it not more than two and a half centuries since Sir Thomas Browne said: "That there was a deluge once seems not to me so great a miracle as that there is not one always;" and "where I cannot satisfy my reason, I love to humour my fancy;" and "I can answer all the objections of Satan and every rebellious reason, with that odd resolution I learned of Tertullian, *Certum est quia impossibile est?*" Yes, it has all been expressed in the *Religio*; but it is no small matter that, in spite of Spencer, Karl Marx, Nietzsche, and Mr. Sidney Webb, there should still be a modern and a popular

way of using the thoughts of Sir Thomas Browne. Mr. Chesterton has been driven into this apparent reaction by the scientific thinkers to whom he was introduced with the scantiest preparation. "It was Huxley and Herbert Spencer and Bradlaugh who brought me back to Orthodox theology." His supernaturalism, which he identifies with orthodox Christianity, I should prefer to call the Romance of Christianity—Romance implying not falsity, but the desirable and the ideal. He deliberately takes that which he and other people *admire* or *want* as the standard of truth. "I want to love my neighbour not because he is I, but precisely because he is not I." "The *heart* of humanity, especially of European humanity, is certainly much more *satisfied* by the strange hints and symbols that gather round the Trinitarian idea, the image of a council at which mercy pleads as well as justice. . . ." Mr. Chesterton defends what he calls Christianity not so much on the ground that it is credible, but on the ground that it is satisfying, that it is agreeable.

I say "what he calls Christianity," for his argument is prone to fall into a vicious circle; he arbitrarily calls all that is satisfying to him by the name of Christianity. It endorses, he says, a "first loyalty to things" and enjoins the "reform of things;" it commands a man "not only to look inwards, but to look outwards." God is a part of the cosmos, and yet he is distinct from it and from us, or we could not worship him. Christianity commands us to desire to live, and it commands us to be glad to die (and this contradiction, he says, like all the others,

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

is human, just as the virtue of courage is human ; for does not courage mean “ a strong desire to live taking the form of a readiness to die ? ”). It is against compromise, against the “ dilution of two things ” neither of which “ is present in its full strength or contributes its full colour ; ” it endorses the extremes of pride and humility, anger and love, mercy and severity. It is full-blooded, allowing place for every human emotion, directing anger against the crime, and love towards the criminal. And he draws a fanciful and grotesque picture of the Christian Church as a “ heavenly chariot ” whirling through the ages “ fierce and fast with any war-horse,” swerving “ to left and right, so as exactly to avoid enormous obstacles.”

I shall not examine this fanciful picture. The Christian Church may have indulged every extreme in human life, but the Christianity of the Bible takes sides more definitely. And as for the Catholic Church, embracing as it did so many seemingly contradictory elements, it is nevertheless true that at one time it failed to satisfy human nature because it was too ascetic, and at another time it caused bloody revolt because it was worldly and luxurious. I need not pursue this question, for the “ orthodoxy ” which Mr. Chesterton defends is not the teaching of the Christian Churches. At first sight it seems to be anarchy modified by mysticism and friendship for persons. But it is more than that. Negatively it is a protest against false culture and cant, and we cannot fail to see that it is at the same time a protest against that virtue which is the predecessor of false

culture—the incessant, arduous effort to seek truth with the help of the intellect and the reason. Positively, it champions the spiritual perceptions on the one hand, and the physical sensations on the other—the excellences of the manifold activities of the human body and soul. Both in his view provide the proper avenues of truth. Every spiritual emotion and every animal passion are in themselves good and excellent. For him the struggle of life resolves itself into a romantic game, with immortality as its conclusion. The one discipline which he upholds, the only precept he has really taken from Christianity, is that arising from love for your neighbour. That unnamable quality in life which in every deeper feeling and every keen perception lights the spirit and charges it with intuitive knowledge is in his philosophy the love of God and the source of the love for persons.

V

SOME MODERN POETS

A FEW years ago it was the fashion to lament the dearth of promising authors, especially poets. But since then we have assured ourselves that we are still, after all, a poetical people. The reproach against the age was taken as a challenge by dozens of young adventurers, who resolved to prove in their own persons that the twentieth century was not without poets. Tiny volumes of verse fluttered forth from the press. Poetry Societies were started, and Poetry Reviews, and men and women met in the darkened hall of Clifford's Inn to hear Mr. Sturge Moore declaim sonorous verses. Publishers began to advertise new genius, and reviewers began to attend to poetry as if it were really a serious business. The opening pages of *The English Review* were devoted to poems which seemed to be appreciated in proportion to their ever-increasing length. Mr. John Masfield had a success such as had been attained by no poet since Stephen Phillips in his prime. It is true that Mr. W. H. Davies might have starved if he had not received a Government pension; that Mr. Yeats—I believe I am right—never entertained the idea of supporting himself by poetry; that Mr. Doughty has not so much as been heard of by one Englishman in a thousand. Nevertheless, poetry has

SOME MODERN POETS

now become a mentionable subject in decent society ; and it is no longer synonymous with Tennyson or Mr. Kipling. It has become a modern thing, lending itself to new experiments, a possible vehicle for new ideas, a means even of becoming notorious on a grand scale.

But before considering some of these younger authors who represent newer phases in poetry I should like to dwell a little upon the work of an elder—one who is not by any means so exquisite a poet as Mr. Robert Bridges, who cannot compare in creative vigour with the greater poets who were contemporary with him, nor with his junior, Mr. W. B. Yeats—but interesting for purposes of comparison because his poetry, even his quite recent poetry, has in it the ring of a past age, of a poetic ideal to which we are not likely to return in this century. I allude to Mr. Edmund Gosse, whom we all think of as a distinguished student and critic of literature, but it is very seldom that we hear any allusion to his poetical work. “ Anyone who has the patience to turn over these pages,” he says in the Preface to his *Collected Poems*, “ will not need to be told that the voice is not of 1911—it is of 1872, or of a still earlier date—since my technique was determined more than forty years ago, and what it was it has remained.” When first I read these words they sounded strangely to me. It was only the other day that he began to edit a distinguished literary page for a daily paper. Still more recently I heard him speaking on a public platform. His activity does not seem to be a thing of yesterday, and it was he who wrote the most intimate and,

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

perhaps, the most interesting biographical study of recent years ; as editor and critic he is still amongst active living writers. In reading his later poems we can see how keen is his desire to retain sensibility to the full, not to become stereotyped by the past, or blind to the newer beauties. He is conscious of the passage of the Time-Spirit and the changed ways of men, and the passionate desire of all vital minds to be fully percipient to the last.

So, if I pray for length of days,
It is not in the barren pride
That looks behind itself, and says,
“ The Past alone is deified ! ”

Nay, humbly, shrinkingly, in dread
Of fires too splendid to be borne—
In expectation lest my head
Be from its Orphic shoulders torn—

I wait, till, down the eastern sky,
Muses, like Maenads in a throng,
Sweep my decayed traditions by,
In startling tunes of unknown song.

In the 350 pages of the *Collected Poems* there is nothing which were better omitted. Even the mere literary experiments, the rondeaus, the sestinas—the literary jokes in which every poet indulges—are neatly turned. Mr. Gosse has attempted, and succeeded with, a great variety of metres. His diction is almost unfailingly good ; indeed, it is the very regularity and faultlessness of his verse that sometimes jars. It is the work of a man many-sided in his nature, many-sided in his moods. He can find himself in the atmosphere of a Coleridge, a Wordsworth, a Keats, a Rossetti, a Béranger, and often his

SOME MODERN POETS

form insensibly glides into that of the precursor whose spirit he for the moment assimilates. He is by no means a mere imitator. His feeling is his own ; but his genius seems to be rather assimilative than strictly creative. Scores of his poems have the beauty and the value of the literature written by the great poets, when they were not in their greatest moods.

And perhaps it is precisely the many-sidedness of Mr. Gosse's tastes and interests which has left him so few decisive poetic successes. He has ranged through literature with a catholic taste. He has helped to create reputations—the reputations, for instance, of Ibsen and Stevenson. There have been many calls upon his literary instinct, and it is not surprising that the most uniformly successful of his poems are those in praise of the great men of letters whom, with his faculty for friendship, he made his friends. In the poems on these men—Ibsen, Ruskin, Stevenson, Henry Sidgwick, Rossetti, and unnamed friends who have departed—there is dignity, fineness, and the pathos of a regret for that which he shared with them, though he lacked the power, or more probably the opportunity, fully to express it.

But not in vain beneath this lofty shade
I danced awhile, frail plaything of the seas ;
Unfit to brave the ampler main with these ;
Yet, by the instinct which their souls obeyed,
Less steadfast, o'er the trackless wave I strayed,
And follow still their vanishing trestle-trees.

The beauties of literature, of many kinds and in many languages, the feeling and perception of friendship, nature, and the whole life-process through

which men pass to a green memory or to oblivion—these are to be found here, the full-bodied expression of a personality—for poetry is that, or nothing. It is no defect in it that it is of 1872—that there is a certain formality, a kind of austerity, even, in its flippancies. It is meditative poetry. It is poetry which is essentially concerned with the emotions, the fancies, or the reflections, the very personal and secluded reflections, of a mind still concerned about the private ways of the spirit. The emotions, the operations of the mind, and the objective things of life—they are the concern of Mr. Gosse as they were the concern of Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, Morris, and many poets before them. For the most part the men of that age adhered to the traditions of poetry, whether they were romantic or classical. At any rate on the formal side most of them—Browning is an exception—remained faithful to the accepted types. On the inner side it was an age which was much concerned about its soul, about nature, and about persons—yes, about persons. Whatever we may think about the Victorian age, from its literature at least we should conclude that it was an age when men valued friendships. And so its best poetry was essentially emotional, personal and subjective.

Now I do not suggest that in the poetry of our younger men there is emerging a single new type with a few distinctive characteristics which can be contrasted with Victorian poetry. On the contrary, if there is anything which we should particularly remark, it is the absence of such typical traits, it is the extraordinary diversity of type ; men are experimenting

with verse, attempting to revive old forms and invent new, to restore the spirit of antiquity or to ride abreast of the practical spirit of the time. Men like Mr. W. B. Yeats and "A. E." sought to unite the ancient and, as they believed, essential Irish spirit with the spirit which is manifested throughout the stream of English lyrical poetry. In Mr. Yeats there was more romanticism than he would care to admit, though the Elizabethan ideal which he cherished and his own power of concentration did much to subdue and chasten the insubordinate, vaguely aspiring spirit which in lesser Celtic poets turns to froth, with no undercurrent of human truth to give significance to its flaky beauty. Fiona Macleod is the classic instance of this frothy Celtic spirit which is unstayed by human truth or relevance to life; and there is much of this in contemporary Irish poetry. Mr. Yeats is not wholly free from it, but he was conscious of the evil tendency, and subdued it, and the body of fine poetry which stands to his name, taken as a whole, is unequalled for clarity, feeling, beauty and felicity of expression by any large body of poetry standing to the name of any other living poet.

But the Time-Spirit is active, or fickle perhaps, and Mr. Yeats has already almost ceased to be a quite modern poet. He, like Mr. Gosse, formed his technique in the nineteenth century, and the twentieth century is casting about with feverish energy for a new technique and new things to express. Mr. William Watson belongs quite as much to the past as does Mr. Gosse, though it might be said of him that he could belong to any age that knew its Milton

and its Wordsworth. In him assuredly there was no attempt at inventiveness ; he has always repudiated the idea that the poet should seek to innovate. He stands for austerity and discipline in thought, style, and diction, for a fine exactness which in his case was compatible with the old passion for the idea of "freedom" no less than with that private, self-communing spirit which the Victorians loved to express. Such a poet as Mr. Maurice Hewlett, antiquarian as he often is in the subjects he treats, is much more modern in spirit. In style and technique he is one of those who have gone back, as men for four centuries have constantly gone back, to the manner of the ancient Greeks. Just as that clever experimenter in verse, Mr. Ezra Pound, has created something of an effect by repeating the very metres, melodies, and mannerisms of the Provençal troubadours, so Mr. Hewlett, modelling his style upon the far finer Greek originals, produced an effect which was better than Mr. Pound's in proportion as the Greek tragedians are superior to the troubadours. In his execution he has really recaptured much of the manner of the great Greek tragedians. In *The Death of Hippolytus* there is something of the aloofness, the blitheness, the thrust of phrases, the grimness, the sedateness which we associate with Greek drama. If he has little of the passion or fluency of Swinburne, he has some of his phrase-making skill, and he is free from that rhythmical lilt which in Swinburne was often excessive. We shall never be carried away as by the music of *Atalanta in Calydon*, but we are often arrested by grim echoes from the actual Greek, apt

SOME MODERN POETS

translations, as they might be, from an existing original.

But though Mr. Hewlett has been clever enough to adapt the technique of Greek poets to his own purpose in poetical drama, nevertheless in his treatment of subject, in thought and feeling, we may see, rather by his defects than by his excellences, how entirely modern he is. In *Minos, King of Crete*, the first play in his trilogy *The Agonists*, we may find ourselves at the outset not a little irritated by his habit of stage-managing with a view to a public that likes sensational and scenic effects. Shakespeare used thunder and lightning at the beginning of *The Tempest*, but only a very modern modern poet could use these devices as an introduction to tragedy. But it is more to the point that his treatment of Pasiphae is not only one that would have been impossible to the Greeks, but would have been impossible to any literary age which had not been so led away by modern theories of realism as to believe that any sort of monstrosity, being conceived as actual, might be made also an object of sympathetic emotion. Pasiphae is a creature of monstrous, unnatural lust, so vile, and so inhuman in its vileness, that it is impossible to conceive that human sympathy should be enlisted in her affair, as if it were a normal and humanly pitiable lapse from virtue. No Greek tragedian ever did attempt, or ever would have attempted, to arouse pity for a creature whose grotesque story expressed the Greek abomination for Phœnician barbarism. Nothing but the Philistine, or in this case Phœnician, realism of the twentieth century, can

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

account for Mr. Hewlett's attempt to elicit fine feeling from an abnormal and nauseous incident.

It has always seemed to me that the transition from the Victorian Age to the experimental age which followed it was marked by the South African War. For a dozen years before that war there had been restless movements in the very heart of the nation ; the men who were to be most conspicuous at the close of the century were leavening the nation or being leavened themselves. Joseph Chamberlain appeared as the embodiment of the transitional spirit in the political arena. In journalism the movement took shape in the person of Alfred Harmsworth. In literature the man of the moment was Rudyard Kipling. These three fateful embodiments of the Time-Spirit seemed to dominate England and shake her clean out of her fin-de-siècle complacency. England could never be the same again, after those three men had been at the helm, for however short a period. The course was deflected ; the reckoning lost. Austere, dignified Whigs would appear again in politics, but never again would their austerity and dignity represent our political system. Sonorous, sober, highly judicious journalists might still succeed in producing, at great loss, a journal expressing themselves and their views, but no considerable section of the nation would ever again hang upon their words. And even in poetry, which lies so much nearer to the roots of human nature, and might therefore be expected to vary less with the fashions of a time, we cannot but perceive that the private, personal utterances of an Arnold, a Tennyson, a Browning, a

SOME MODERN POETS

Rossetti, would have less chance of being heard in the din of to-day, however sweet the expression, however intimately moving to the spirit. There is a poet belonging to the younger generation who has written lyrics of exquisite grace and charm, who can deal half playfully, half seriously with the lightest of subjects, and make it delicate and entrancing ; who can touch the deeper note of the romantic poets and make of it something grim, perplexing, haunting ; or can produce in a few stanzas an intimate feeling for persons portrayed in some suggestive aspect. Mr. Walter De la Mare is well known to a small circle of literary persons, but neither his poems nor his prose-writings have been widely read as they should have been.

Mr. Rudyard Kipling would perhaps shudder at the thought, but it is evident—is it not to his credit ?—that he was essentially a democrat. He made his appeal to the average man. His ballads were written about ordinary men and ordinary things ; the feelings they portrayed were the feelings of everyday life, feelings which everyone without distinction might feel in a vigorous and perhaps boisterous way. Wordsworth never really brought poetry back to the common, everyday life of simple folk. Long ago Coleridge pointed out that this was a popular superstition about Wordsworth shared by the poet himself. But to a far greater extent Mr. Kipling did make his appeal to the common stock of everyday and average emotion—the emotion of the average man. He was not interested, as the great Victorian poets had been, in the lonely way of the spirit ; in

the more personal emotions ; or in nicety of expression. For him it was the corporate spirit that counted—the instinct, not for friendship, but for fellowship. He had sentiment in abundance, but he approached sentiment with that sort of nervous braggadocio with which the schoolboy conceals his softer feelings. A clever American critic, Mr. Bliss Perry, alludes to that “commonness of mind and tone” which Mr. Bryce declared to be inevitable among masses of men associated, as they are in America, under modern democratic government. “This commonness of mind and tone,” says Mr. Perry, “is often one of the penalties of fellowship. It may mean a levelling down instead of a levelling up.” The loud stridency of Mr. Kipling’s voice is perhaps “one of the penalties” which has to be paid for the democratic sentiment of fellowship.

That there should be some “levelling down” is sure to follow when the poet finds himself absorbed in the common emotions of common life, and speaking to the common man. But there need not necessarily be that coarseness of sentiment, that crudity of thought, that bigotry of limited sympathy, mis-called patriotism, which has debased the level of so much of Mr. Kipling’s writing. I should say that Mr. G. K. Chesterton owes more than he supposes to the influence, direct or indirect, of Mr. Kipling ; that though his opinions, his sympathies, his conclusions are all diametrically opposed to those of the elder writer, still there is something in common between the two which is essentially a democratic quality, the final standard being that of reference to commonness,

SOME MODERN POETS

normal feeling, the common man. Mr. Chesterton wrote a very stirring poem in his *Ballad of King Alfred*, a ballad which appealed to patriotism, fellowship, and those broad, profound emotions which underlie the common sense of a people. It was far nearer to the spirit of the *Barrack Room Ballads* than he, I am sure, would be willing to admit.

Mr. Kipling did this great thing, if not for literature, at least for men and men-of-letters. He expressed emotions in language which was as far as possible from the language of æstheticism. This meant, perhaps, that he could not express very subtle or unusual emotions, that his perceptions were broad rather than fine; but he at least taught the world that there were certain profound manly feelings which might be expressed without the preliminary *unmanning* of æstheticism; and his distinction lies in the fact that he uttered them with vehemence and intensity. In Victorian times the average citizen thought of poetry as a somewhat weak-minded, effeminate pursuit—as very often it was. The poet who might be persuaded of the sublimity of his calling had necessarily to steel himself against the abuse of the matter-of-fact persons who have no traffic in poetry; and in so doing he lost the advantage of that bracing though insufficient criticism by which the sane, practical man influences many of the arts; that is to say, the readers and upholders of poetry everywhere agreed to put the poet beyond the reach of a criticism from which prose can never be wholly exempt. The matter-of-fact view being put out of

court in the judgment of poetry, the poet was encouraged to believe that he was not concerned with the same universe as that of common fact. I have heard literary critics speak of romantic or highly imaginative novels, saying : " It is all delicate fancy and imagination ; it is not concerned with realities ; it is sheer poetry "—as if poetry were not concerned with realities ! I have heard people criticise the prose works of Mr. A. C. Benson : " This is all too musical, and sentimental, and self-centred ; this sort of thing cannot be done in prose ; it should be done in poetry "—as if nonsense becomes less nonsensical by means of metre or rhyme ! This easy-going view of the function of the poetic art has borne an ample harvest of nonsense. I could, were it worth while, name many living bards who consider that any sort of fancy or feeling is good enough for poetry so long as it be prettily or gracefully handled, who would thus degrade poetry to the position of the easiest, as it has for long been the least prized, of the fine arts.

This havoc has been wrought, in part, by what I may call the doctrine of the sensitive soul. Keats is the classic example of the poet who lived and died through sensitiveness. It was a weakness inherent in the romantic movement which, though it had so much that was enchantingly strange and beautiful to give to the world, bequeathed to it also a consciousness of its nerves and a pride in its very defects. When Coleridge had taught his successors to glorify the poetic perception and vision, to give to the secret feelings a new warrant and value, they came to think it boorish to conceal their fine feelings, and

they acquired the habit of expressing feelings which the common man scarcely experiences without a sense of shame. The poet came to be essentially the man who felt acutely, and anything that was a "feeling" came to have a sort of value of its own as denoting poetic sensitiveness. Hence the excessive softness, the indefiniteness, the languishing and the effeminacy which since the beginning of the nineteenth century have been tolerated in poetry because poetry was supposed to be the proper vehicle for such weakness. It is significant that the most admired poem of Keats begins with a sentiment which we should agree to detest in a prose-writing :

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk——

I contend that as this sentiment would be intolerable in prose, so also it is not to be suffered in poetry.

Now, the Kipling epoch did introduce a certain hardness, or masculinity, into the cultured life of the country which gave an opportunity for escape from the querulousness and the vagueness which had become poetic habits among English poets and lovers of poetry. I say the "Kipling epoch," for Mr. Kipling himself never had the self-discipline, perhaps had not the sense of form, to achieve much durable poetry, and his very masculinity turned at last into an unmasculine shriek. He marked no more than the transition period. Mr. Chesterton is a part of it. He, too, is lacking in sense of form and diction, and could never have been a considerable poet, though there is in his writings abundant evidence of poetic feeling. What I am concerned to observe is that his

ballad poetry, too, is marked by that essentially masculine note which seemed to have died out of English poetry—unless Browning and Morris be taken as exceptions. Mr. Hilaire Belloc comes at the latter end of the transition period. When a man has only written a few poems it is injudicious to say of him that he is a great poet. But, at any rate, Mr. Belloc has written a few poems which belong to the great order of lyrical verse, and in *The South Country* he surpasses anything that Kipling or Henley achieved, anything perhaps that any English lyrical poet has written this century. If that is not a great poem, then I for one will abjure great poetry, and be content with the less. There is all Mr. Kipling's sense of fellowship, a thousand times refined, and in alliance with all the most vital emotions of life, the sense for concrete, simple things, the sense for things remembered, of tragedy expected but not feared, the feeling for men, as men; for places, as places; for things, as things; for the emotions, as the ironies of life; for the ludicrous, as the surface aspect of the pathetic—for the whole male side of existence which poetry for a hundred years has been inclined to ignore.

It is quite evident in the very early poetry of Mr. John Masefield that the loudly reverberating ballads of Rudyard Kipling had had their effect upon him; that something of their sheer vehemence and lustiness had mingled with his own feeling for the tropical seas into which he had adventured, with the vivid sense of men and things in strange places which had wrought upon his imagination, as years before they

SOME MODERN POETS

had wrought upon Mr. Conrad. Needless to say, Mr. Masfield in most respects stands at the opposite pole of temperament from Mr. Kipling. He is a lyrical poet whose poetry springs not so much from intense interest in the lusty vigour of common life as from an intense feeling for sheer beauty, for that exquisite refinement which may be extracted from life; and it may be mingled with equally intense pain when the beauty is removed. He is, perhaps, more nearly akin to the type to which Keats belonged. But certainly the arrival of the spirit represented by Kipling, added to the discipline of his own early adventures, braced him and energised him; and almost his first literary effort took the form of ballad poems uniting a fineness and sweetness which were entirely his own with a kind of lusty vigour which was superimposed. It is easy enough to see the influence of Kipling in a ballad such as that which begins:

Spanish waters, Spanish waters, you are singing in my ears,
Like a slow sweet piece of music from the grey forgotten years;
Telling tales, and beating tunes, and bringing weary thoughts
to me

Of the sandy beach at Muertos, where I would that I could be.

Those early ballads had some of the emotional vigour without the characteristic defects of Kipling, and in many cases a charm which was entirely his own. But he very early shook off what there was of that Kipling influence. It was superficial and transitory. Mr. Kipling, as I have said, represented a transition period; and another—an experimental period—has followed. It is probable that Joseph Conrad became a far more potent influence on the imagination of

Mr. Masfield than any one other author ; though he was assuredly not content to follow any single example, and began steadily to experiment and to strike out his own line. It was unfortunate that the craze for experiment and innovation should, for a time—probably a brief time—have had so strange and uncouth an effect upon so fine and sensitive a genius. Mr. Masfield was—and is—a lyrical poet, fitted to express the personal emotions which lyrical poetry can support. But he became obsessed with the conviction that poetry ought to be made to do something else than suggest feelings and ideas in a beautiful way ; that it ought to serve a social purpose ; that it ought to become a direct contributory force to the social morality of the time ; that it ought to concern itself with practical modern questions in a practical way ; that it ought to present actual life, realistically. The same feeling affected a lesser poet, Mr. Wilfrid Wilson Gibson, who, being a story-teller in verse and a moralist, has been acclaimed as a powerful poet in both England and America. Mr. Gibson has not yet shown that he is a considerable poet. But Mr. Masfield undoubtedly does possess the poetic talent, perhaps even genius, which Mr. Gibson has not yet revealed. But the most recent poems of the former have been praised for just the same reasons that Mr. Gibson's have been praised. The New York *Outlook* said of Mr. Gibson : " He is bringing a message which might well rouse his day and generation to an understanding of and a sympathy with life's disinherited—the overworked masses." Mr. Masfield's *The Everlasting Mercy* and

SOME MODERN POETS

his series of realistic poems of the same order have been lavishly culogised in exactly the same way—and for a similar reason. Each of these poems contains a rousing story ; each subserves the purpose of an excellent moral. They are realistic enough, but only in rare passages are they beautiful. “ Nothing,” said Shelley, “ can be equally well expressed in prose that is not tedious and supererogatory in verse.” I have felt that Mr. Masfield’s long narrative poems might equally well have been expressed in prose.

I believe this to be no more than a passing phase in Mr. Masfield. A poet who could write the charming lyrical poem which, by a curious accident, was published at the end of *The Everlasting Mercy* in the *English Review* will not long be content to write sensational tracts ; we may even be glad that these tracts have been written if they bring the public to attend to the more significant work of so finely gifted an author.

But I am very far from suggesting that the effort made by Mr. Gibson and Mr. Masfield to bring poetry into touch with modern life is without significance. It represented reaction against the querulousness, the vagueness, the mere prettiness which have so often resulted in nauseous verse. It had its source in the same impulse which led J. M. Synge to create his finest imaginative effects by means of a severely realistic method. And still earlier Mr. Doughty, who holds a solitary position in modern poetry, had expressed himself in the only way that was natural to him, through an archaic language, the language in which he thought, which lent itself to the hard, vivid,

and superbly brutal images belonging to his primitive, barbarian, and as it were primeval theme. Mr. Doughty belongs neither to our own nor to any other age, but he has not been without influence upon men of our time. To appreciate *The Dawn in Britain* or *Adam Cast Forth* is to long for the hardness and masculinity which have been rare in English poetry for a hundred years ; to feel that what poetry needs is more grit and more brain ; and to plead for these is to plead for more poetry, for a stronger imagination.

There is one among the younger poets who has given promise of satisfying these needs, though it remains to be seen whether he may not perhaps be over-weighted on the side of intellect. But in *Mary and the Bramble* and *The Sale of St. Thomas* he has shown us how the poetic imagination ripens into food for adults when virility and intellect have gone to the making of it. There is no mere prettiness in Mr. Abercrombie's writing. The wearisome refrain of sex, disappointed or desirous, neither has part in the argument nor supplies him with images or asides. Innumerable things and events upon the earth appeal to him because of that full-bodied experience which they carry to the wakeful and the zestful, experience which is manifold, which fills all the chinks of memory, which may recall pain, which may be charged with pathos, but is never morbid ; beautifully he masses vigorous impressions of sense under a large imaginative idea. Here there is no pale, languishing phantom of beauty, but that which men delight in without the verbal distractions of the æsthete.

SOME MODERN POETS

In *Mary and the Bramble* he has taken an intellectual idea and treated it allegorically, and essentially poetically. The Virgin Mary in his story symbolises the “upward meaning mind,” fastened in “substance,” yet pure and “seemly to the Lord ;” and the bramble which clutches her and seeks to smirch her purity is the folly, the muddiness, the stupid cruelty of the world which mocks at all vision, at all idealism—it is the mortal trying to drag down the immortal part of man. Mary is the love of beauty, or of God ; the bramble is the stupidity and grossness of the practical world.

But Mary, “in her rapt girlhood,” with her “eyes like the rain-shadowed sea,” is not the less sweet because she stands for an idea.

Through meadows flowering with happiness
Went Mary, feeling not the air that laid
Honours of gentle dew upon her head ;
Nor that the sun now loved with golden stare
The marvellous behaviour of her hair,
Bending with finer swerve from off her brow
Than water which relents before a prow ;
Till in the shrinking darkness many a gleam
Of secret bronze-red lustres answered him.

And when the Spirit of Life vaunts itself in her,

Not vain his boast ; for seemly to the Lord,
Blue-robed and yellow-kerchief, Mary went.
There never was to God such worship sent
By any angel in the Heavenly ways,
As this that Life had utter'd for God's praise,
This girlhood—as the service that Life said
In the beauty and the manners of this maid.
Never the harps of Heaven played such song
As her grave walking through the grasses long.

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

I cannot dwell upon the subject of *The Sale of St. Thomas*. The dialogue between Thomas and the captain gives opportunity for description and metaphor almost Elizabethan in their ferocity, though the reflections of Thomas have a spiritual quality which is entirely modern. We hear

Of monkeys, those lewd mammetts of mankind.

And of flies staring

Out of their little faces of gibbous eyes.

And there are lines such as

Men there have been who could so grimly look
That soldiers' hearts went out like candle flames
Before their eyes, and the blood perisht in them,

which might be placed side by side with Marlowe's :

The frowning looks of fiery *Tamburlaine*
That with his terrour and imperious eies,
Commands the hearts of his associates.

And we may contrast these vehement records of things with the more philosophic passages :

Thou must not therefore stoop thy spirit's sight
To pore only within the candle-gleam
Of conscious wit and reasonable brain ;
But search into the sacred darkness lying
Outside thy knowledge of thyself, the vast
Measureless fate, full of the power of stars,
The outer noiseless heavens of thy soul.

We may well think that the immediate future of poetry depends upon men of the stamp of Mr. Abercrombie, men for whom poetry is neither a plaything nor a sweet-sounding expression of desire

SOME MODERN POETS

or anguish or vague dreams ; but a serious attempt to grapple with life through combined experience, thought, and vision. Long ago Meredith urged that if fiction was to go on living, it must give us "brain-stuff" and "food-stuff." But no poet has since arisen to make some similar claim for poetry ; to urge that within its proper sphere and in its own appropriate way it should attack the larger life of man with intelligence, with common sense, and with virile passion.

Mr. W. H. Davies stands apart from them all. I should not like to try to account in any way for Mr. Davies any more than he could account for a singing-bird by describing the trees among which it lived. His poetry is unlike any other poetry that is written to-day. It is fresh and sweet like a voice from a younger and lustier world. It is charged with no clarion message of prophecy ; it is burdened with no exactly formulated philosophy of life. There is no rhetoric in it, no rhodomontade. It is the melody of a man's voice singing for the pleasure of singing, now vehemently, from the sheer delight in things physical and outward, now sadly, as some evanescent object induces melancholy, now in a naively reflective way, as past or future brings memories or expectations. He never reaches quite the exquisite melodies of Herrick, but when he writes of love he is as simple as Herrick, and he is more direct, more heart-whole, less of the perfect singer, perhaps, but more of the lover. If he writes with wide-eyed wonder at the simpler marvels of life, it is in the manner of Blake

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

in *Songs of Innocence*, where outwardness of manner and lyrical simplicity leave an impression of something unearthly in its strangeness. Occasionally in the slight extravagance of his imagery we can see that the influence of the seventeenth-century "metaphysical" poets has not left him unscathed, as when he likens love to the influence of spring opening up navigation.

But it is a sure instinct which has taken him to the simpler lyrical poets and led him to mould his style on theirs. His interests lie in the purely personal affairs of the heart ; the simpler emotions may be best expressed in those lyrical forms in which the older English literature is pre-eminent, which eschew the fervid rhythms of the soulful nineteenth century. But he is not merely imitative. Sometimes in the same poem we see him, now conforming to the manner of the traditional love-poet, now revivifying it or bursting through it with images and ideas that are wholly personal to himself.

She had two eyes as blue as Heaven,
Ten times as warm they shone ;
And yet her heart was hard and cold
As any shell or stone.

Her mouth was like a soft red rose
When Phœbus drinks its dew ;
But oh, that cruel thorn inside
Pierced many a fond heart through.

She had a step that walked unheard,
It made the stones like grass ;
Yet that light step has crushed a heart,
As light as that step was.

SOME MODERN POETS

Those glowing eyes, those smiling lips,
I have lived now to prove
Were not for me, were not for me,
But came of her self-love.

Yet, like a cow for acorns that
Have made it suffer pain,
So, though her charms are poisonous,
I moan for them again.

In any other poet the cow and the acorns would be an intolerable extravagance ; but not so from Mr. Davies, who knows and loves all beasts of the field ; who knows what it is to tramp over stones and to tread the grass, so that his "stones like grass" rings freshly, while the dew-drinking Phœbus is stale.

But if he seems to belong to an older tradition, and to have little in common with the self-conscious modern poet, that is only because his life has kept him away from the fashions and fashionable ideas which are the intellectual superficialities of our time, which distinguish the culture of one age from the culture of another. He loves with the strength of intimate friendship the unchanging things in the natural world, the sea, things that grow, and animals and birds. And he is acquainted with the other unchanging things—love, the desire for food, hatred of death, friendship. He is also too keen in his sympathies and interests not to be modern in the sense, for instance, that the romantic appeal has had its effect on him, or that the ugly facts of modern life have stirred and pained him. There is a great variety of emotions registered in his poems. There is the grim ballad called *Treasures*. There is a bold union

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

of magical romanticism and sensuous passion in the poem beginning :

I met her in the leafy woods,
Early a summer's night ;
I saw her white teeth in the dark,
There was no better light.

There is a remarkable confidence and elation in the little poem *The Elements*, wherein he identifies himself with Nature—it could only be quoted entire. And he records his impression of a tramcar which sweeps along Westminster in the twilight carrying its load of sleeping men to work. He can also write in a vein wholly unlike that of his simple and more characteristic lyrical verses. Thus he describes his childish impressions of a mariner “no good in port or out,” as his granddad said :

And all his flesh was pricked with Indian ink,
His body marked as rare and delicate
As dead men struck by lightning under trees,
And pictured with fine twigs and curled ferns ;
Chains on his neck and anchors on his arms ;
Rings on his fingers, bracelets on his wrist ;
And on his breast the Jane of Appledore
Was schooner rigged, and in full sail at sea.
He could not whisper with his strong hoarse voice,
No more than could a horse creep quietly ;
He laughed to scorn the men that muffled close
For fear of wind, till all their neck was hid,
Like Indian corn wrapped up in long green leaves ;
He knew no flowers but seaweeds brown and green,
He knew no birds but those that followed ships,
Full well he knew the water-world ; he heard
A grander music there than we on land.

All of it is the intensely personal and direct poetry of a man of many moods, many sympathies, but

SOME MODERN POETS

happily removed from the cramping effects of current fashions of thoughts, and talk about thought. He has lived in the open air and among simple people, but always companioned by the poets. And so we have in him a singer fresh and unspoilt, writing from impulse, probably with little conscious technique, about things which he knows and the immediate experiences of life.

VI

J. M. SYNGE

FOUR volumes, none too thick, contain the collected works of the man who is coming to be regarded as the greatest of Irish dramatists. As we turn over the pages, and observe that they contain no more than six plays—three of them very short—a few Poems and Translations, the volume on the Aran Islands, and a volume of miscellaneous studies of his experiences among the folk of Wicklow, Kerry, and the Congested Districts, it is to feel wonder that a man with so profound an imagination, so wide a knowledge of the folk, and such genius for creation, should have produced only this for his life-work. And then we remember the lamentable fact of his early death—he was born in 1871—and the no less important fact that he was one for whom experience of living counted equally with the experience of art, and that he wrought as few English authors work, being at the pains to write and re-write till he had the result to his mind.

And so in these four volumes there is nothing whatever to regret—nothing that can be passed over as dull or indifferent, nothing that has not both a hard basis of actuality and also an intensity of imagination that lifts it into the region of poetry. In one of his later moments of self-consciousness he uttered a

sentence of criticism worthy to be treasured by the modern poet, and perhaps by the Irish poet especially. "It may almost be said that before verse can be human again it must learn to be brutal." What would we not give to have Synge's "brutality" introduced into the over-idealised and sonorous poetry of Mr. Yeats? He does not mean the brutality of our English realists, or ugliness, sheer fact, mis-called truth, without beauty; what he wants is fidelity to *common* truth, a realisation of the root, primitive facts—the most grim primitive facts—that hard basis of fact which must be accepted before the imagination can bear fruit.

One of the most singular qualities of Synge is the extraordinary common sense which sustains the gruesomeness of his tragic imagination on the one side, and his no less gruesome humour on the other. It holds together this humour and this grimness which are so truthfully united in his work. It is the common sense of the old-fashioned poet, the common sense which is all-pervading in Homer's *Odyssey*—based upon a strong, keen sense for the concrete, ordinary things of life. It is this which makes him find the masterly conclusion to *Riders of the Sea*, when old Maurya, lamenting the death of her sons, comforts herself, "No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied;" it is this which gives Naisi the ancient love of life, "It's a hard and bitter thing leaving the earth;" which produces so admirable a proverb as, "Who would listen to an old woman with one thing and she saying it over?"; and enables Pegeen, in *The Playboy of the Western World*, to per-

ceive, if only from pique, the preposterousness of her infatuation—"There's a great gap," she says—and this is the gist of the matter—"between a gallous story and a dirty deed." But never does such common sense stay the flight of the poetic dream. Pegeen may know the difference "between a gallous story and a dirty deed," but that does not stop her from breaking out into wild lamentations: "Oh, my grief, I've lost him surely. I've lost the only Playboy of the Western World."

It is by never departing far from the high-road of common fact that Synge suggests to us the fascinations, the dangers, and romance of the by-paths. I think that when he travels a very long way from that high-road he does not hold us with so firm a hand. Beautiful as is the prose-poetry of *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, and fine as is the idealised portrait of Deirdre, yet, as a whole, this play does not grip so well as his other, even his slighter, plays. Is it not because he is moving away from the common life, which he knows so well how to light up into the uncommon atmosphere of the grim, the fanciful, the romantic, into the already half-conventionalised art atmosphere of the old heroic Saga? Most of his success in *Deirdre of the Sorrows* is due to the fact that he has treated Deirdre as if she were just one of the peasant women whom he has known; but the ready-made plot has hampered him, and he is shut off from the use of those little "brutalities" which give savour to his modern plays. The actual life is not there to secure him, and he falls into the characteristic Irish vagueness in praising the poet-hero—even Pegeen, in *The Playboy*, had

spoken of poets as "fine, fiery fellows with great rages when their temper's roused" (it is just so that the Irish poets like to be pictured; and Mr. Jack Yeats, in a drawing usually much admired, has transformed Synge himself into just such a "fine, fiery fellow" of the tradition). In *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, Synge could not, of course, free his mind from the traditional story, or from the poetry of all the poets who have sung of Deirdre; but should Deirdre herself, at the tragic moment when her lover lies dead, be thinking of "the way there will be a story told of a ruined city and a raving king and a woman will be young for ever?" This is like many Irish poets, but it is not worthy of Synge.

It was his genius to be able to tell the stories that have not been traditionalised, and to tell them in a wonderful dialect which may or may not be true to any actual speech, but which, unlike the jargon that is affectation in many Irish writers, used by him, has the power of affecting us as the old Ionic could move those who spoke in Attic Greek. It helps us to get into the fanciful and grotesque atmosphere which he conjured up out of the most real life. In all his modern plays there are character, dramatic intensity, fidelity to the folk life—and that life, with its brutality and its delicacy, attains the utmost that life can hold, seen through the poetic vision of Synge, made poignant and vivid by his imagination.

VII

THE SHRAMANA EKAI KAWAGUCHI

Books are like places of entertainment in that they often afford a pleasure wholly different in kind from that intended by the author. An original and cultured gentleman of my acquaintance has a habit of visiting suburban music-halls, and deriving therefrom a delight exquisite beyond the dreams of the artists who forgather at the Wormwood Scrubs Empire. In like manner there are books which have come to be accepted as classics on the ground of excellences not aimed at by their authors, not necessarily because the authors were artless, but because their conscious art had no relation to the quality in them which pleases. Pepys was a first-rate Admiralty official and a desirable boon companion, but to his many excellences, known to himself no less than to his friends, that of being a master in English literature would never have been added. A still better example is the *Little Flowers of St. Francis of Assisi*. We read them now because of what we are accustomed to call their "human interest," because they show us the robust, ordinary, fleshly, and ideal side of pious mediæval Catholics ; they appeal to us humorously and pathetically ; they are tragicomedies of the transcendental life. But they were written to commemorate the pious acts of the saints,

and the authors would have been shocked to think that they were contributing to the profane delight of the general and possibly heretical reader. In the same way the *Journal of John Wesley* is a delight to many people to whom Wesley's peculiar excellences make no appeal. He was a great evangelist, a powerful emotional influence, a considerable thinker, a scholar, a robust man, and a gentleman of the Church of England. But when we have named all these qualities we have scarcely begun to account for the endless delight of his *Journal*. That which he consciously aimed at is not that which gives all of us pleasure.

To books of this class I should be disposed to add that of the Shramana Ekai Kawaguchi, a distinguished Japanese priest, scholar, and traveller, who wrote a book entitled *Three Years in Tibet*. It must not be supposed that the Shramana is a simple or unsophisticated writer, or that he has not studied literary effects; but his intentional effects have the charm of *naïveté* to an English reader, and his narrative is wholly unstudied in respect of all that delights us in it.

Such a book as this makes us distrustful of all our standards. It is an example of art as unconscious as that of the song of some vain, but for the moment solitary, child. It declares to us that Nature, when we can bring to it our own appreciation, is the first thing, and that the idealism of art is the second-best with which we content ourselves when Nature, with its direct appeal, is in abeyance.

The Shramana accomplished a journey which has

few parallels in the history of travel. He spent three years residing and travelling in the uplands of Tibet, after the exclusion of strangers had become a rigorous policy, and before the British punitive expedition had inspired fear of the long-handed foreigner. He had with him no organised escort of men and mules such as accompanied Sir Sven Hedin in his more recent and better advertised expedition. He went alone and in disguise, as Burton went on his pilgrimage to Mecca; on intimate terms with the natives as Mr. Doughty was with the Arabs; a mendicant as Arminius Vambery has been in Asiatic Turkey and Persia. And he had an advantage which none of these travellers had, one which he did not scruple to use to the utmost—he was a Buddhist, like the Tibetans, and not only a Buddhist, but an exceptionally learned priest, possessed of a knowledge of things holy which he used with a religious fervour tempered with Odysseian guile. He was no missionary, but he carried the true Buddhism about with him in Tibet as discreetly as Borrow carried his Bibles in Spain; and his style has a curious resemblance to that of our English gipsy. With everyone whom he meets he converses on religion, philology, love, or the stars, in the gayest argumentative manner, and these dialogues come as interludes to adventures as thrilling as any that ever fall to the lot of man. In a few paragraphs he will dwell on the almost inconceivable perils he experienced from mountains, floods, storms, and famine, and in the next he is dryly recording the discourse of a holy lama, the wayside gossip of robbers, or the passionate advances of a love-sick

maiden, against whose enticements he steeled himself with the fortitude becoming to his profession. He tells us with what joy he preached the simpler truths of Buddhism to the attentive nomads, and in the next page remarks somewhat inconsistently : " I had my own reasons for being painstaking in these preachings. I knew that religious talks always softened the hearts of my companions, and this was very necessary, as I might otherwise have been killed by them. . . . Fortunately my sermons were well received by my companions." His whole journey was necessarily a long and systematic tissue of deception, but when set on by robbers he disdains to preserve his worldly trash by a concealment of the truth. When his friends in Lhasa discover that he is not, as he has been supposed to be, a Chinaman, but a foreigner from Japan, he begs them to save themselves and send him in fetters to the Dalai Lama ; but sacred meditation and a supernatural voice add themselves opportunely to the persuasions of his friends, and with this divine sanction he makes good his escape.

The book, indeed, has a fourfold value ; it reveals artlessly and perfectly the character of the Shramana Ekai Kawaguchi, and that is worth knowing in itself. Secondly, it unfolds the emotional and intellectual aspects of Japanese Buddhism, showing this religion both on its theological side and as a practical working influence. Thirdly, it introduces us to a host of Tibetan persons, one after another, presenting not a vague, impressionist account of them, but individuals with whom he lived on intimate equal terms in daily

social intercourse. And in the fourth place it gives us what we may take to be an authoritative account of the whole social system of Tibet—the priesthood and religion, administration, finance, trade, and the relations between the sexes and castes.

Having in 1891 given up the rectorship of a monastery in Tokyo, he lived for some years as a hermit and devoted himself to the study of Buddhistic books in the Chinese language. In the course of his studies he learnt that there were Tibetan translations of the sacred text which, though inferior in general meaning to the Chinese, were superior as literal translations. He determined, therefore, to undertake a journey to the forbidden land and travel there alone as a mendicant priest. The many presents his friends offered him before his departure he “declined to accept, save in the form of sincerely given pledges” (and the sum of 430 yen, mentioned subsequently).

From a fisherman he exacted the promise to discontinue the cruel habit of catching fish; from a poultry-man he secured a promise not to kill fowls; and “from immoderate smokers I asked the immediate discontinuance of the habit that would end in nicotine poisoning. About forty persons willingly granted my appeal for this somewhat novel kind of farewell presents.” We are reminded of John Wesley’s exhortations to his followers to abstain from the pernicious habit of drinking tea—“I proposed it to about forty of those whom I believed to be strong in faith; and the next morning to about sixty more, entreaching them all to speak their minds

freely. They did so; and in the end saw the good which might ensue." In many moments of dire peril experienced by the Shramana in Tibet, these "effective" gifts, it seems, "contributed largely toward my miraculous escapes."

Before he could begin the most arduous part of his journey it was necessary that he should serve an apprenticeship of no less than three years in Darjeeling and Nepaul, studying the Tibetan language and grammar, and Tibetan Buddhism, befriending beggars with the double object of bestowing charity and gaining information, and ascertaining the possible routes across the Himalayas. Then one day he was conducted to the summit of a lofty and unguarded pass, whence, on July 4, 1900, with his luggage on his back, alone, he stepped on to the soil of Tibet, and entered upon an unknown and apparently interminable wilderness.

In his wanderings over mountains, deserts, and rivers there was no form of hardship and danger which he had not to encounter. Now he spent a night in the open, nearly frozen by snow, the pain of the cold being interrupted only by the abstraction of "meditation" and the joy of composing *utatar* (short poems). Now he was nearly drowned in fording a river, from which he was saved at the moment he was expressing a desire to be born again. Now he was overtaken by a sandstorm, now bereft of his money, now nearly perishing of hunger. But from every danger he emerged triumphant. When he approached the tents of nomads or pilgrims and had pointed his staff at the threatening dogs, he was

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

generally received with hospitality, and on one occasion he fell in with a party of robbers who were undergoing a period of penance at Manasarova, and made him their guest for two months. They approach the sacred peak of Kailasa :

It inspired me with the profoundest feelings of pure reverence, and I looked up to it as a "natural mandala," the mansion of a Buddha and Bodhisattvas. Filled with soul-stirring thoughts and fancies I addressed myself to this sacred pillar of nature, confessed my sins, and performed to it the obeisance of one hundred and eight bows. I also took out the manuscript of my "twenty-two desires," and pledged their accomplishment to the Buddha. I then considered myself the luckiest of men, to have thus been enabled to worship such a holy emblem of Buddha's power and to vow such vows in its sacred presence, and I mused :

Whate'er my sufferings here and dangers dire,
Whate'er befalls me on my onward march,
All, all, I feel, is for the common good
For others treading on Salvation's path

The night of my performance of these devotional practices must have been a matter of wonder and mystery to my companions. They had been watching me like gaping and astonished children, and were all intensely curious to know why I had bowed so many times, and read out such strange Chinese sentences. I was glad to explain to them the general meaning of my conduct and they seemed to be deeply struck with its significance. They said they had never known the Chinese Lamas were men of such Bodhisattvic mind ! The upshot was that they asked me to preach to them that night, a request to which I was very glad to accede. The preaching which

followed, which I purposely made as simple and as appealing to the heart as possible, seemed to affect them profoundly, and to make the best possible impression on them ; so much so that they even shed tears of joy. The preaching over, they said in all sincerity that they were glad of companionship, and even offered to regard me as their guest during the two months which they intended to spend in pilgrimage to and round the Kang Rinpoche. They thought that their pilgrimage over such holy ground, while serving such a holy man as I now was to them, would absolve them completely from their sins.

It was during this pilgrimage that there occurred the tender episode already alluded to, from which the Shramana, though "neither a block of wood, nor a piece of stone," emerged even more creditably than John Wesley when similarly tempted in Georgia.

I can give no account here of his arrival in Lhasa, the reputation he gained as a "Chinese" physician, his kindly reception by the Dalai Lama, or his intimate friendships with the apothecary and the ex-Minister of Finance. He gives a vivid picture of the life of the different classes of priests and monks, and the corrupt state of the Tibetan hierarchy. He describes the rudimentary system of education, the harsh and haphazard administration, the brutality of punishments, the system of espionage, the free position of women and the practice of polyandry, the filthy personal habits of the people, their superstitions, their occupations, their festivals. I do not dwell upon these matters, partly because many of the features described are common to other oriental

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

countries, but mainly because I am here considering the peculiar excellence of the book as a book of travel, a “ human document ”—as the phrase goes—a record of experience which has taken the stamp of a most interesting personality.

VIII

FRANCIS THOMPSON

IN *The Blue Bird* of Maeterlinck we are told of a child who puts on a magic hat and turns a fairy diamond and sees all that was ugly and sordid transformed into something transcendently beautiful. There was no need for Francis Thompson to find a magic hat ; the poetic instinct which was always with him gave him the insight into another poet's nature ; he saw through, around, and beyond those unlovely passages in the life of Shelley which made Matthew Arnold, for once so strangely an adherent of Mrs. Grundy, exclaim, " What a set ! What a world ! " There are few appreciations in the English language comparable to his essay on Shelley. Fixing his eyes on what seems to him essential in the man, Thompson finds that everything else explains itself to the observer who will see with the poet, who can understand his sufferings, and imagine his delights. And so his essay is no ordinary study in criticism. He sets himself, indeed, as Pater would have done, to find what it is that makes the specific worth of the poet. But there is no laborious calculating of values ; rather a lavish pouring forth of the just meed of praise, an interpretation, a vindication of Shelley, like Swinburne's vindication of Blake, in language less passionate, perhaps, but more perfect in its

melody, and more significant in its imagery, responding to its theme with tremulous beauty.

Mr. Wyndham, I think, did not go far from the truth when he said that this "is the most important contribution to pure letters written in English during the last twenty years." For in a certain sense it seems to reach an even greater height than Thompson's poetry. For whilst he has written exalted poetry, thought-compelling poetry, magnificent in diction and appealing to the deeper emotions, there is in this essay a simplicity which was often lacking in the former, and a passionate pleading which combines the cogent lucidity of a Newman with the other-worldness of a St. Francis. If it has a fault, it is that of being too rich in its imagery, too lavish of its judgments, too overbearing in its vision of beauty, so that some critics will say that it is too poetical for prose. It is, indeed, the prose of a poet, and such as only a poet would or could write; but its harmony, its structural balance, its masterly transitions are, save in a few cases, those which are proper to prose.

There is, perhaps, something a little forced in the opening passage in which he commends the services of poetry to the charity of the Church, paragraphs which were designed to conciliate the editor of the *Dublin Review*. He passes to consider the defect which has "mildewed" all the poetry written since Shelley, "the predominance of art over inspiration, of body over soul." Not, he holds, that inspiration has been lacking—"the warrior is there, but he is hampered by his armour." "We are self-conscious

to the finger-tips ; and this inherent quality, entailing on our poetry the inevitable loss of spontaneity, ensures that whatever poets, of whatever excellence, may be born to us of the Shelleian stock, its founder's spirit can take among us no reincarnation. An age that is ceasing to produce child-like children cannot produce a Shelley. For both as poet and man he was essentially a child."

"To the last," he exclaims, "he was the enchanted child." And he explains what he means in words that may seem fantastic: "It is to have a spirit yet streaming from the waters of baptism ; it is to believe in love, to believe in loveliness, to believe in belief." And he suggests that "Shelley never could have been a man, for he never was a boy. And the reason lay in the persecution which over-clouded his school days." He was a grown-up child when he sailed his paper boats on the Isis, when in his loves he gave way to that "straying, strange and deplorable, of the spirit," when he rebelled petulantly but not ungenerously against the order of the world, and when he soared with the cloud or the skylark like the "child-like peoples among whom mythologies have their rise." In his poetry "he is still at play, save only that his play is such as manhood stops to watch, and his playthings are those which the gods give their children. The universe is his box of toys. He dabbles his fingers in the day-fall. He is gold-dusty with his tumbling amidst the stars. He makes bright mischief with the moon."

And, in the same, full way, Thompson explains in what sense Shelley was a poet of Nature ; in what

manner images poured naturally from his lips as they ought to have done, but never did, pour from the lips of the metaphysical poets; by what "instinctive perception of the underlying analogies, the secret subterranean passages, between matter and soul," he was able to make such imaginative play with abstractions; and, finally, how in his shorter poems he "forgets for a while all that ever makes his verse turbid; forgets that he is anything but a poet, forgets sometimes that he is anything but a child." And all the time the essayist is dropping phrases which surely are unforgettable, striking us alike by their truth and their pregnancy—"this beautiful, wild, feline poetry, wild because left to range the wilds."—"His Muse has become a veritable Echo, whose body has dissolved from about her voice."—"He stood thus at the very junction-lines of the visible and the invisible, and could shift the points as he willed. His thoughts became a mounted infantry, passing with baffling swiftness from horse to foot or foot to horse."

Even to-day, five years after his death, Thompson has not attained the full fame which he merits. It is true his very first book won the highest praise from critics no less distinguished than Coventry Patmore, Mr. Arthur Symonds, and Mr. H. D. Traill, and long before his death it was no small circle of admirers who looked eagerly for each new poem from his pen.

Yet his genius is not of that kind which instantly communicates itself to a generation. Living apart in a spiritual atmosphere of his own, his heart divested

of the desires which form half the life of most men, his gaze was fixed on the inner mysteries of the spirit and on those outer forms which are the vehicles of beauty. The very language he used was as far remote as possible from "the brutish jargon we inherit." He belonged to the hierarchy of the poets of all ages, and pressed into his service lovely, half-forgotten words which made his poetry seem strange and bizarre to those who were too much immersed in the language and literature of their day. And those subtler minds who instantly perceived its beauty, and saw how his language and his imagery often recalled those of the seventeenth-century metaphysicals, such as Crashaw, too readily perhaps asserted a bond between his thought and theirs. Like them, it is true, he turned his back on the delusive splendours of the world; he accepted and expressed in song the divine ordinance of the universe. But he was afflicted with the pain of modern doubt; fear and speculative curiosity struggled with his faith; sometimes the sheer beauty of the external world, so far from proving the divine beauty, seemed to him as a possible refuge in his vain flight from the "Hound of Heaven."

He cannot be allocated to a single school. In his reading he had ranged through the poets of all ages, and he had assimilated a mighty variety of emotions, and we may see how his form shows the influence now of one poet, now another—Milton, Cowley, Shelley, Hood, Poe, and Rossetti—yet each influence, as it came upon him, was passed through the crucible of his own defined temperament, and the resultant is

wholly his own, a creature which speaks of half-suppressed emotion, yet fantastically rich in phrase, rhythm, and image. His study of all the poets seems to have opened to him more avenues of beauty than were open to any poet of the middle seventeenth century. There is in his blood the fantastical romance of the Elizabethans ; the love of spiritual contemplation which marked the seventeenth-century mystic ; the passionate adoration of Nature and the open air which came with the early nineteenth century ; modern introspectiveness ; and that habit of symbolism with which Rossetti and his school have made us familiar.

Sometimes his pregnant phrases, his literary imagery, his stately, sweeping rhetoric, and the note of underlying melancholy would lead us to compare him with Virgil rather than with any modern poet.

Under this dreadful brother uterine,
This kinsman feared, Tellus, behold me come,
Thy son stern-nursed ; who mortal-mother-like,
To turn thy weanlings' mouth averse, embitter'st,
Thine over-childed breast. Now, mortal-sonlike,
I thou hast suckled, Mother, I at last
Shall sustentant be to thee. Here I untrammel,
Here I pluck loose the body's cerementing,
And break the tomb of life ; here I shake off
The bur o' the world, man's congregation shun,
And to the antique order of the dead
I take the tongueless vows.

But those last lines :

And to the antique order of the dead
I take the tongueless vows.

we cannot compare with any model. They stand by themselves, unsurpassable, lines such as are only to be found here and there even in the great poets.

The more one reads this poetry of Thompson's the more one discovers that it is something essentially individual. Harmonies that one may miss on a first reading become more apparent and more insistent as one reads again, and the exquisite, haunting melody of his verse pursues us, and its faultless, rich rhythms seem to create new patterns of form. One may miss not a little of his thought, because the engrossing beauty of the language lays hold of the senses. In almost every poem one finds some lingering phrase :

Whatso looks lovelily
Is but the rainbow on life's weeping rain.

Or :

The little sweetness making grief complete.

Often he shows that exact sense of lyrical fitness which Milton pre-eminently possessed, and, second only to him, Shelley. We see it in the passage which begins :

Suffer me at your leafy feast
To sit apart, a somewhat alien guest,
And watch your mirth,
Unsharing in the liberal laugh of earth.

The Hound of Heaven, I think, has rightly been pronounced his greatest poem, for whilst in its wealth of melody, its magnificence of imagery, and its pathos, it is unsurpassed, it reveals also the finest depths of his thought as he takes us "down the labyrinthine

PERSONALITY IN LITERATURE

ways " of his mind's flight. But next to that I would put *The Making of Viola*, a poem which no other, except Rossetti or his sister Christina, could have written :

I

The Father of Heaven.

Spin, daughter Mary, spin,
Twirl your wheel with silver din ;
Spin, daughter Mary, spin,
Spin a tress for Viola.

Angels.

Spin, Queen Mary, a
Brown tress for Viola !

II

The Father of Heaven.

Weave, hands angelical,
Weave a woof of flesh to pall
Weave, hands evangelical—
Flesh to pall our Viola.

Angels.

Weave, singing brothers, a
Velvet flesh for Viola !

III

The Father of Heaven.

Scoop, young Jesus, for her eyes,
Wood-browed pools of Paradise—
Young Jesus, for the eyes,
For the eyes of Viola.

Angels.

Tint, Prince Jesus, a
Dusked eye for Viola !

It may be that he will always be a poet for the few ; that his mystical, esoteric spirit, finding its proper expression in baffling imagery and elusive, other-worldly rhythms, will never be wholly con-

FRANCIS THOMPSON

genial to the many. But his place is assured ; for he had no traffic with the things of a day or the language of a day. The beauty which haunts his prose and his verse is of that universal order which can hardly fade by the mere passing of time. Only a change in the human spirit can make it dim.

NOTE

Many of the foregoing chapters are based upon articles which have been published in periodicals. My thanks are due to the Editors of the following journals, which I name in the order of my indebtedness:—*The English Review*, *The Nation*, *The Daily News*, *The North American Review*, *The British Review*, and *The Athenæum*.

THE COMPLETE DRAMATIC WORKS OF

Gerhart Hauptmann

AUTHORIZED EDITION IN SIX VOLUMES

IT is generally conceded that Gerhart Hauptmann is the most notable dramatist of the present day. His work combines literary, psychological and dramatic interest in greater measure than that of any other contemporary writer, and the award of the Nobel prize in literature was a public recognition of his genius.

An authorized translation of his dramas makes it possible at last for English people to study and enjoy Hauptmann. Excellent translations of a few plays had already been made and these, by arrangement with the respective translators, will be adapted to the present edition, but new translation will be made whenever it seems necessary in order to maintain the highest standard. The editor of the edition is Professor Ludwig Lewisohn. He supplies a general introduction to Hauptmann's works in Volume I, and a briefer introduction to each succeeding volume.

CONTENTS

Volume I

Social Dramas

Before Dawn
The Weavers
The Beaver Coat
The Conflagration

Volume III

Domestic Dramas

The Reconciliation
Lonely Lives
Colleague Crampton
Michael Kramer

Volume V

Symbolic and Historical Dramas

Schluck and Jau
And Pippa Dances
Charlemagne's Hostage

Volume II

Social Dramas

Drayman Henschel
Rose Bernd
The Rats

Volume IV

Symbolic and Legendary Dramas

Hannele
The Sunken Bell
Henry of Aue

Volume VI

Later Dramas in Prose

The Maidens of the Mount
Griselda
Gabriel Schilling's Flight

Each Volume Crown 8vo. Price Five Shillings net

TWO NEW VOLUMES IN THIS SERIES

WALT WHITMAN

A CRITICAL STUDY

BY

BASIL DE SELINCOURT

WALTER PATER

A CRITICAL STUDY

BY

EDWARD THOMAS

Each Volume Demy Octavo. With a Frontispiece
Portrait in Photogravure.

Price 7s. 6d. net.

UNIFORM WITH "PEOPLE AND QUESTIONS"

DRAMATIC PORTRAITS

By P. P. HOWE

THROUGHOUT this book a particular point of view has been adhered to, from which the drama is looked upon as a separate art from literature, and from which especial attention is paid to the manner of its practice. Thus nearly all the plays of the dramatists passed under review are to be studied in book form, but they are spoken of here, as far as possible, in terms of their actual presentation in the theatre. The dramatists include Pinero, Henry Arthur Jones, Henry James, Oscar Wilde, Bernard Shaw, Barrie, Hubert Henry Davies, Granville Barker, Hankin, Galsworthy and Masefield. It is a book for all playgoers who have done their playgoing in the English theatre of the last twenty-five years.

The portraits which illustrate it are from camera studies by Mr. E. O. Hoppé, reproduced by a new process which does full justice to his original prints.

Large Crown 8vo. Price 5s. net.

NEW FICTION

SINISTER STREET

By COMPTON MACKENZIE

Author of "Carnival."

THE STORY OF LOUIE

By OLIVER ONIONS

Author of "The Debit Account."

HANDS UP !

By FREDERICK NIVEN

Author of "The Porcelain Lady."

TELLING THE TRUTH

By WILLIAM HEWLETT

Author of "Uncle's Advice."

UNDERGROWTH

By F. and E. BRETT YOUNG

A First Novel.

THE BANKRUPT

By HORACE HORSNELL

A First Novel.

THE FOOL'S TRAGEDY

By A. SCOTT CRAVEN

A First Novel.

This book is **DUE** on the last date stamped below

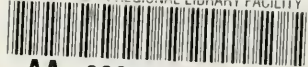
JUL 24 1938

APR 10 1938

MAY 27 1949

JUL 14 1964

JUL 23 1964



AA 000 577 651 3

PN 511, 34.3P

CALL NUMBER SER VOL PT COP AUTHOR

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
THIS BOOK CARD



University Research Library



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54
IBM L 302 02

ORNIA

